



From Policy to Practice: *Can Four Decades of Agricultural Reforms Deliver Youth Self-Employment in Tanzania?* A Focus on Higher Learning Institution Graduates

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Abstract: Youth unemployment in Tanzania persists as a structural challenge despite forty years of economic reforms that transformed the agricultural sector from state-controlled to market-oriented production. This paper addresses a critical paradox: while agriculture employs over 54% of Tanzanian youth and contributes 26% of national GDP, higher learning institution (HLI) graduates remain largely absent from the sector, with university graduate unemployment at 10.6%. The central problem is whether four decades of policy reforms have created genuine self-employment pathways for educated youth in agriculture. Employing a systematic literature review methodology, this paper synthesizes evidence from policy documents (1984–2024), national labor force surveys (2014–2021), peer-reviewed studies, and program evaluations of youth agricultural initiatives including NSYIA (2016–2021) and BBT-YIA (2022–2030). Results indicate that while significant opportunities exist across crop value chains (high-value horticulture, rice, oilseeds, spices), livestock enterprises (poultry, dairy, insect-based feed), and cross-cutting areas (digital agriculture, contract farming, organic production), graduates face five binding constraints: insecure land tenure and intergenerational transfer delays, unaffordable credit requiring collateral they do not possess, weak market infrastructure and price volatility, climate change impacts on rain-fed systems, and deeply embedded negative perceptions of farming as punishment or poverty-driven. The paper's policy contribution lies in systematically evaluating the implementation gap between pro-youth agricultural policies and on-the-ground realities for graduates. Empirically, it provides novel synthesis linking graduate unemployment rates to specific, untapped nodes in agricultural value chains beyond primary production. The paper concludes that agriculture holds genuine potential for HLI graduate self-employment, but only if complemented by land tenure security reforms, graduate-tailored financial products (e.g., collateral-free lending, youth credit guarantees), climate-smart agriculture adoption, and structured mindset change interventions embedded in university curricula. Recommendations urge central and local governments, financial institutions, and universities to co-create an enabling environment that transforms agriculture from a sector of last resort into a dignified, profitable career pathway for Tanzania's educated youth.

Keywords: Youth employment, Agricultural value chains, Higher education graduates, Economic reforms, Self-employment

1.0 Background Information

Youth employment remains one of the most pressing policy challenges in sub-Saharan Africa, where young people constitute the largest demographic segment yet face persistently high unemployment and underemployment rates (ILO, 2024). Tanzania exemplifies this paradox: despite nearly four decades of economic reforms that reduced state control, liberalized markets, and encouraged private investment, the formal economy generates only 50,000 to 60,000 new jobs annually, while approximately 850,000

young Tanzanians enter the labour market each year (Danish Trade Union Development Agency, n.d.). Consequently, youth unemployment, particularly among the educated, has become a structural feature of the national economy rather than a transitory phenomenon.

Agriculture has historically served as Tanzania's primary employer. The sector provides livelihoods for about 65% of Tanzanians, contributes 26.1% to national GDP, and accounts for 66.6% of total national employment (NBS,



2022; URT/MoA, n.d.). With 7.1 million hectares of high and medium potential land, extensive river systems, and a diverse agro-ecological environment, the agricultural sector possesses considerable untapped capacity for employment generation (MAFC, 2015). Nevertheless, youth participation in agriculture remains far below its potential. According to the Integrated Labour Force Survey 2020/21, while 54.9% of Tanzania's youth population is employed in agriculture, university graduates exhibit a 10.6% unemployment rate, notably higher than those with no formal education (6.1%) (NBS & OCGS, 2021). This disconnect suggests that higher learning institution (HLI) graduates, despite their advanced training, are not translating agricultural potential into self-employment.

The African Union's Malabo Declaration (2014) obliges member states to create job opportunities for at least 30% of young people within agricultural value chains by 2025 (AU, 2014). Tanzania has responded with a series of policies and programmes over four decades: from the National Investment Promotion Policy (1996) and the Small and Medium Enterprise Development Policy (2002) to the National Strategy for Youth Involvement in Agriculture (NSYIA) 2016–2021 and the flagship Building a Better Tomorrow: Youth Initiative for Agribusiness (BBT-YIA) 2022–2030 (URT, 1996; URT, 2002; URT, 2016; URT/MoA, n.d.). These policy frameworks explicitly recognise agriculture as a strategic sector for youth employment, yet the gap between policy intention and graduate uptake remains wide.

Several structural constraints explain this implementation gap. First, land tenure insecurity and intergenerational transfer delays, exacerbated by increased life expectancy, limit youth access to productive land, which in turn undermines their ability to use land as collateral for credit (Lindsjö *et al.*, 2020; Msangi *et al.*, 2024). Second, formal financial institutions require immovable assets that most graduates do not possess, restricting access to affordable agricultural credit (URT/MoA, 2020). Third, limited market infrastructure, price volatility, and post-harvest losses, particularly for perishable horticultural products, reduce the profitability of graduate-led agribusinesses (Mashindano *et al.*, 2013). Fourth, climate change and its variability disproportionately affect rain-fed smallholder systems, increasing production risks (URT, 2017). Finally, deeply embedded negative perceptions of farming, often associated with punishment, poverty, and limited social mobility, deter educated youth from considering agriculture as a dignified career pathway (Odira, 2021; Open Mind Tanzania, 2018).

Despite these constraints, emerging opportunities within agricultural value chains offer new entry points for HLI graduates. High-value horticultural crops (coloured sweet peppers, off-season tomatoes, mushrooms, avocados, spices)

require shorter growing cycles and less land, making them suitable for capital-constrained entrants (Mashindano *et al.*, 2013). Livestock sub-sectors, particularly white meat (poultry) production, demonstrate strong domestic demand and export potential (MLF, 2022). Digital agriculture solutions, farm management applications, e-extension services, and market linkage platforms, enable tech-savvy graduates to create service-based agribusinesses without owning land (FAO, CTA & IFAD, 2014). Contract farming and out-grower schemes can provide upfront inputs and assured markets, reducing price and marketing risks (Sahota, 2013). Organic farming, responding to global demand for naturally grown foods, presents premium pricing opportunities (Tandon, 2022).

Therefore, this paper addresses a central question: *after four decades of agricultural policy reforms, can Tanzania's agricultural sector deliver viable self-employment pathways for higher learning institution graduates?* Henceforth, by systematically reviewing policy documents, labour force surveys, and empirical literature from 1984 to 2024, the paper identifies binding constraints, maps untapped opportunities across crop and livestock value chains, and proposes actionable pathways to bridge the persistent gap between policy promise and graduate practice.

2.0 Empirical and Theoretical Framework

Understanding whether four decades of agricultural reforms can deliver self-employment for higher learning institution (HLI) graduates in Tanzania requires an analytical framework that integrates individual agency, structural constraints, and policy environment. This paper draws on three complementary theoretical lenses: the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF), the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), and Institutional Theory. Together, these theories explain why graduates may or may not translate agricultural opportunities into viable self-employment, and how policy interventions can bridge the gap between intention and action.

2.1 Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF)

The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework, originating from the work of Chambers and Conway (1992) and subsequently operationalized by the Department for International Development (DFID, 1999), provides a holistic lens for understanding how individuals combine assets to pursue livelihood outcomes. The framework identifies five capital assets: human (skills, knowledge, health), social (networks, relationships), natural (land, water), physical (infrastructure, equipment), and financial (savings, credit, income). These assets are mediated by vulnerability context (shocks, trends, seasonality) and transforming structures (institutions, policies, processes) to produce livelihood strategies and outcomes.



In the context of this paper, HLI graduates enter agriculture with relatively high human capital (university training) but typically low natural capital (landlessness), limited financial capital (lack of savings or collateral), and variable social capital (weak linkages to agricultural value chain actors). The vulnerability context includes climate change, market volatility, and land use conflicts, while transforming structures include land tenure policies, agricultural credit regulations, and youth employment programmes such as NSYIA (2016–2021) and BBT-YIA (2022–2030). The SLF thus explains why even well-educated youth may fail to achieve sustainable agricultural self-employment unless policies deliberately address deficits in natural, financial, and physical assets (Scoones, 2009).

2.2 Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)

The Theory of Planned Behaviour, developed by Ajzen (1991), suggests that behavioural intention is the immediate antecedent of action, and intention is shaped by three constructs: attitude towards the behaviour (positive or negative evaluation), subjective norm (perceived social pressure), and perceived behavioural control (perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behaviour). Perceived behavioural control can also directly predict behaviour when it reflects actual control.

TPB is particularly relevant for understanding HLI graduates' reluctance to pursue agricultural self-employment. Multiple studies from Tanzania report negative attitudes towards farming, which is often perceived as a “*resort for the poor and uneducated*” (Open Mind Tanzania, 2018, p. 4) and associated with punishment in schools (Odira, 2021). Subjective norms, family expectations, peer pressure, and societal prestige attached to formal white-collar jobs, further discourage agricultural careers. Perceived behavioural control is low due to anticipated barriers: land access, credit constraints, market risks, and lack of practical skills (URT/MoA, 2020). Consequently, even when objective opportunities exist, weak intention translates into low uptake of agricultural self-employment among graduates.

2.3 Institutional Theory

Institutional Theory, as articulated by North (1990) and subsequently applied to development contexts, distinguishes between formal institutions (laws, policies, regulations) and informal institutions (norms, customs, cognitive schemas). Together, they structure incentives and constrain or enable individual behaviour. Institutional change is often incremental, and policy implementation gaps arise when formal rules conflict with informal norms or when enforcement mechanisms are weak.

Tanzania's four decades of agricultural reforms have produced a dense formal institutional landscape: the National Investment Promotion Policy (1996), the Small and Medium Enterprise Development Policy (2002), the National Youth Development Policy (2007), the National Agriculture Policy

(2013), the National Strategy for Youth Involvement in Agriculture (2016–2021), and the Building a Better Tomorrow initiative (2022–2030) (URT, 1996; URT, 2002; URT, 2007; URT, 2013; URT, 2016; URT/MoA, n.d.). However, informal institutions, such as intergenerational land transfer norms that delay youth access to land, gender norms that restrict young women's ownership of productive assets, and cultural devaluation of farming as an occupation, persist and often override formal policy intentions (Lindsjö *et al.*, 2020; Msangi *et al.*, 2024). Institutional theory thus explains the recurrent gap between policy promise and graduate practice: formal policies exist on paper, but informal institutions and weak enforcement prevent their translation into tangible opportunities for educated youth.

2.4 An Integrated Theoretical Framework for Graduate Self-Employment in Agriculture

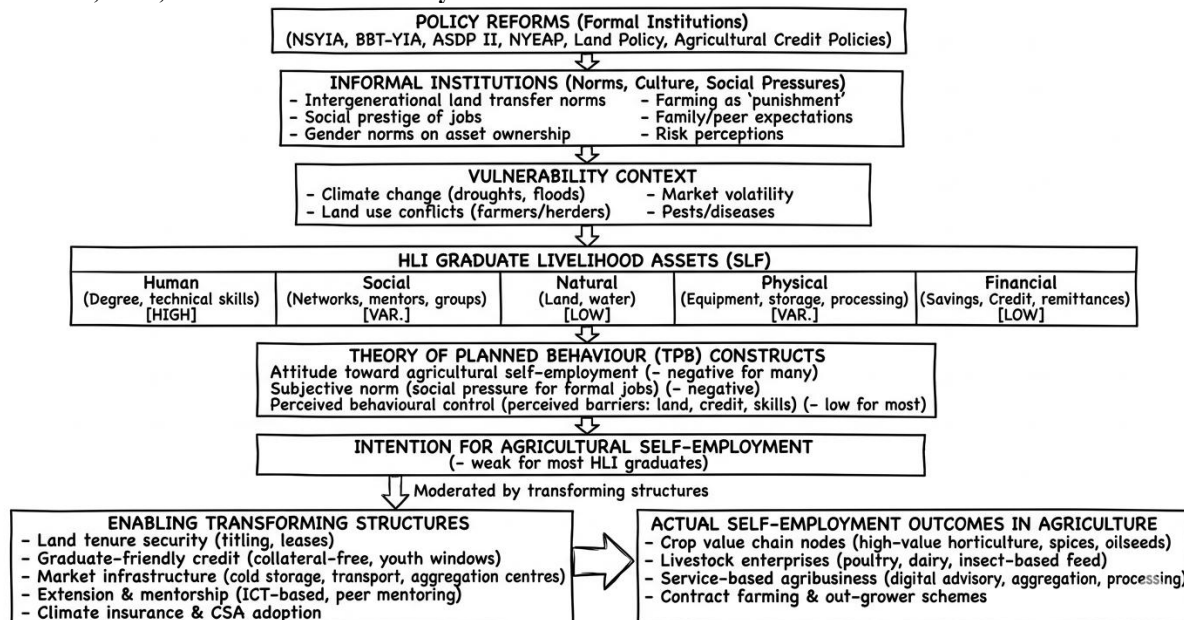
Integrating the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF), Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), and Institutional Theory, this paper proposes a conceptual framework (Figure 1) that explains HLI graduates' transition, or failure to transition, into agricultural self-employment in Tanzania. The framework posits that policy reforms (formal institutions) interact with informal institutions (deeply embedded norms, cultural attitudes, and social pressures) to shape two critical domains: first, the vulnerability context, which includes climate shocks (droughts, floods), market volatility, pests and diseases, and land use conflicts between farmers and herders; second, the availability and composition of five livelihood assets, human (education, skills), social (networks, mentors), natural (land, water), physical (equipment, storage, processing facilities), and financial (savings, credit access). Graduates typically possess high human capital but severely low natural and financial capital. Their perceived behavioural control and attitudes toward agriculture (TPB constructs) mediate the relationship between these asset endowments and their intention to pursue agricultural self-employment. However, intention alone is insufficient. Actual self-employment outcomes are realized only when intention is supported by enabling transforming structures, including land tenure security, graduate-friendly collateral-free credit products, market infrastructure (cold storage, aggregation centres), and structured mentorship, and when vulnerability shocks are mitigated through agricultural insurance, climate-smart practices, and early warning systems. Without these enabling conditions, even positive intention fails to translate into sustainable agricultural self-employment.



The framework thus provides a coherent analytical architecture for answering the paper’s central question: *Can four decades of agricultural reforms deliver youth self-employment for Tanzania’s higher learning institution graduates?*

Tanzanian Ministry of Agriculture website (www.kilimo.go.tz), National Bureau of Statistics (www.nbs.go.tz), the President’s Office - Regional Administration and Local Government (PO-RALG), and the ILO labour database. Grey literature including unpublished

Figure 1: An Integrated Theoretical Framework for HLI Graduate Self-Employment in Tanzania’s Agricultural based on SLF, TPB, and Institutional Theory



3.0 Methodology

This paper employs a systematic literature review methodology to examine whether four decades of agricultural reforms have delivered self-employment pathways for higher learning institution (HLI) graduates in Tanzania. The methodological approach follows the established guidelines for systematic reviews in social sciences and development studies (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006; Moher *et al.*, 2009), ensuring transparency, replicability, and rigour.

3.1 Research Design

A qualitative systematic review design was adopted, suitable for synthesizing evidence from heterogeneous sources including policy documents, national labour force surveys, peer-reviewed journal articles, institutional reports, and programme evaluations. This design enables the identification of patterns, gaps, and contradictions across a forty-year period (1984–2024) and allows for the integration of both formal policy intentions and empirical implementation outcomes (Gough, Oliver & Thomas, 2017).

3.2 Search Strategy and Data Sources

A multi-pronged search strategy was employed between June and November 2024. Electronic databases included Google Scholar, Scopus, and Web of Science, using search term combinations: (“youth employment” OR “graduate unemployment” OR “young people”) AND (“agriculture” OR “agribusiness” OR “value chain”) AND (“Tanzania” OR “economic reforms” OR “structural adjustment”). Policy documents and official statistics were retrieved from the

dissertations and policy briefs were sourced from the Sokoine University of Agriculture repository and the Economic and Social Research Foundation (ESRF).

3.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Studies and documents were included if they met the following criteria: (i) *published between 1984 and 2024*; (ii) *focused on youth (aged 15–35 years) or HLI graduates in Tanzania*; (iii) *addressed agriculture, agribusiness, or agricultural value chains*; (iv) *contained empirical data or policy analysis relevant to employment or self-employment*; (v) *written in English*. Exclusion criteria were: (i) *studies focused exclusively on primary school or secondary school youth without HLI relevance*; (ii) *agricultural technical studies without employment outcomes*; (iii) *opinion pieces without empirical or policy evidence*; (iv) *studies from other East African countries without Tanzania-specific data*. Table 1 summarizes the document selection criteria.



Table 1: Document Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for Systematic Review

Criterion Category	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Time period	Published between 1984 and 2024	Published before 1984 or after 2024
Population	Youth (15–35 years) or HLI graduates in Tanzania	Studies on primary/secondary youth only; non-Tanzania populations
Topic focus	Agriculture, agribusiness, agricultural value chains, self-employment	Agricultural technical studies without employment outcomes; non-agricultural sectors
Document type	Peer-reviewed articles, policy documents, official statistics, programme evaluations, dissertations	Opinion pieces, conference abstracts without full text, news articles
Language	English	Non-English
Geographic scope	Tanzania Mainland and Zanzibar	Other East African countries without Tanzania-specific data

Source: Authors' construction based on systematic review protocol

3.4 Search Outcomes and Study Selection

The initial electronic database search yielded 847 records. After removing duplicates (n=203), 644 records were screened by title and abstract. Of these, 412 were excluded as irrelevant to the research question. The remaining 232 full-text documents were assessed for eligibility against the inclusion criteria in Table 1. A further 168 documents were excluded: 72 lacked HLI graduate-specific data, 54 focused on non-agricultural employment, 28 were from other countries without Tanzania disaggregation, and 14 were duplicate policy versions. The final review included 64 documents: 28 peer-reviewed journal articles, 18 policy documents (including Acts, policies, strategies, and

programme frameworks), 10 official statistical reports (NBS and OCGS), 5 programme evaluations, and 3 unpublished dissertations. Figure 2 presents the systematic review flow diagram following PRISMA guidelines (Moher *et al.*, 2009).

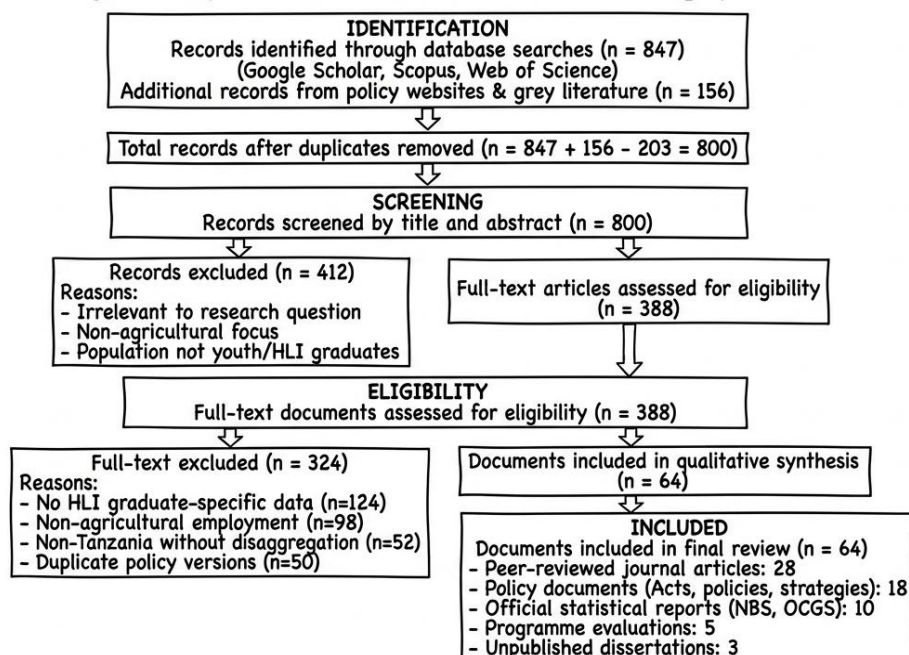
As shown in Table 1 and Figure 2, the final review corpus of 64 documents provides comprehensive coverage of both policy intentions (formal institutions) and empirical outcomes across the forty-year reform period. The documents span from the early structural adjustment era (mid-1980s) through the National Strategy for Youth Involvement in Agriculture (NSYIA 2016–2021) and the Building a Better Tomorrow initiative (BBT-YIA 2022–2030).

3.5 Data Extraction and Synthesis

Data extraction was conducted using a standardized template that captured: (i) author(s), year, and document type; (ii) research question or policy objective; (iii) study population (youth, HLI graduates, or general); (iv) agricultural sub-sector (crops, livestock, cross-cutting); (v) key findings on opportunities and constraints; (vi) policy recommendations. Two reviewers independently extracted data from 20% of the documents to ensure reliability, with disagreements resolved through consensus discussion.

Synthesis employed thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006), involving six phases: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final synthesis. Themes were organized deductively around the integrated theoretical framework (SLF assets, TPB constructs, and institutional factors) and inductively from emergent patterns in the literature. NVivo

Figure 2: PRISMA Flow Diagram for Systematic Review of HLI Graduate Self-Employment in Tanzanian Agriculture



Source: Authors' construction following Moher *et al.*, 2009



14 software was used to manage coding and theme development.

3.6 Quality Appraisal

Quality appraisal of included studies was conducted using appropriate tools: peer-reviewed articles were assessed using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist for qualitative studies (CASP, 2018); policy documents were assessed for relevance, authority, and timeliness using the AACODS checklist (Authority, Accuracy, Coverage, Objectivity, Date, Significance) developed by Tyndall (2010); statistical reports were assessed for methodological transparency and data quality. No documents were excluded based on quality appraisal alone, but lower-quality sources were given less weight in synthesis findings.

3.7 Limitations

Several methodological limitations should be acknowledged. First, the predominance of grey literature (policy documents, programme evaluations, unpublished dissertations) reflects the limited peer-reviewed empirical research specifically on HLI graduates in Tanzanian agriculture. Second, national labour force surveys (ILFS 2014, 2020/21) do not always disaggregate youth employment by educational level within agricultural sub-sectors, limiting granular analysis. Third, publication bias may exist towards studies reporting successful interventions, while implementation failures may be under-documented. Fourth, the forty-year timeframe introduces heterogeneity in data quality, definitions (e.g., “youth” age ranges have varied), and policy contexts. Despite these limitations, the systematic review provides the most comprehensive synthesis to date on whether four decades of reforms have delivered self-employment for HLI graduates in Tanzanian agriculture.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and synthesises the findings from the systematic review of 64 documents, organised around four thematic areas: (i) *trends in youth employment status (1984–2024)*; (ii) *the evolution of Tanzania’s policy environment for youth in agriculture*; (iii) *actual patterns of youth employment in the agricultural sector*; and (iv) *constraints and opportunities for higher learning institution (HLI) graduate self-employment*. Each subsection integrates empirical results with theoretical insights from the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF), Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), and Institutional Theory.

4.1 Trends in Youth Employment Status in Tanzania (1984–2024)

The review reveals persistent structural mismatches between labour supply and formal job creation across the forty-year reform period. As shown in Table 2, approximately 850,000 young Tanzanians enter the labour market annually, yet the formal economy generates only 50,000–60,000 new jobs each year (Danish Trade Union Development Agency, n.d.). This supply-demand gap has widened over time, with youth unemployment rates consistently higher than adult rates.

Table 2: Annual Labour Market Entry and Formal Job Creation in Tanzania

Indicator	Estimate	Source
Young people entering labour market annually	~850,000	Danish Trade Union Development Agency (n.d.)
Formal sector jobs created annually	50,000–60,000	Danish Trade Union Development Agency (n.d.)
Annual absorption rate of formal sector	5.9% – 7.1%	Authors’ calculation
Youth unemployment rate (15–35 years, 2020/21)	12.6%	NBS & OCGS (2021)
Adult unemployment rate (36–64 years, 2020/21)	5.6%	NBS & OCGS (2021)

Source: Authors’ compilation from Danish Trade Union Development Agency (n.d.) and NBS & OCGS (2021)

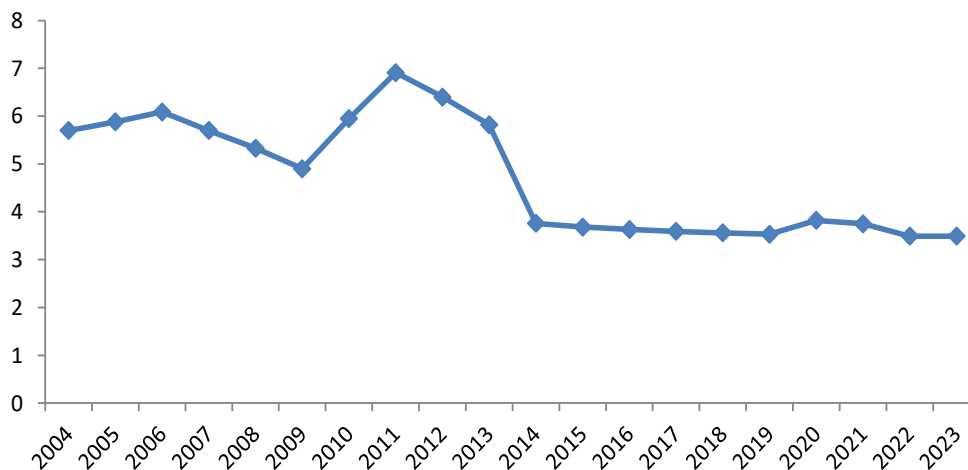
Table 2 illustrates the magnitude of the employment challenge: less than 10% of annual youth labour market entrants secure formal employment. This finding aligns with Institutional Theory, which predicts persistent gaps between formal policy intentions (e.g., job creation targets) and actual outcomes when informal institutions (e.g., patronage networks, risk-averse hiring practices) and weak enforcement mechanisms prevail (North, 1990).

Figure 3 presents the trajectory of Tanzania's youth unemployment rate from 2004 to 2023. Despite fluctuations between 3.53% (2019) and 6.91% (2011), with an average of 4.75%, the rate remains a policy concern because underemployment, measured as working fewer hours than desired or in low-productivity activities, affects a much larger proportion of youth. As ILO (2015, cited by FAO, 2016) notes, global youth unemployment is three times higher than for older adults, and youth are most likely to be in part-time, seasonal, low-paying, and precarious jobs.

Table 3 disaggregates unemployment by geographical area and education level, revealing two critical patterns for HLI graduates. First, unemployment is lowest in rural areas (7.4%), where agriculture dominates employment, and highest in Dar es Salaam (20.5%). This supports the view that agriculture absorbs labour even when other sectors do not (Maselle, 2020). Second, university graduates exhibit a 10.6% unemployment rate, notably higher than those with no formal education (6.1%) and those with tertiary education (11.4%). This inverted pattern, more education, higher unemployment, reflects a mismatch between graduate skills and labour market demand, a phenomenon Ndyali (2016) attributes to Tanzania's theoretical-heavy education system that lacks practical, employable skills.



Figure 3: Tanzania’s Youth Unemployment Rate Trend (2004–2023)



Source: Authors’ construction based on NBS & OCGS, 2021; World Bank, 2023

Table 3: Tanzania’s Unemployment Rates by Geographical Area and Education Level (2020/21)

Category	Sub-category	Total Unemployment (%)
Area	Rural	7.4
	Other urban	11.0
	Dar es Salaam	20.5
Education level	Never attended	6.1
	Primary education	8.8
	Secondary education	13.8
	Vocational education	11.7
	Tertiary education	11.4
	University education	10.6

Source: NBS & OCGS (2021)

youth employment in agriculture. Table 4 summarises the key policy milestones and their stated objectives regarding youth in agriculture.

Despite this dense formal institutional landscape, the review reveals a persistent implementation gap. For example, the NSYIA (2016–2021) set ten specific youth outcomes (URT, 2016), yet post-evaluation evidence indicates limited achievement on land access, financing, and market access targets (Lunogelo *et al.*, 2017; URT/MoA, 2020). From an Institutional Theory perspective, this gap arises because informal institutions, including intergenerational land transfer norms, gender-biased asset distribution, and social devaluation of farming, remain largely unaddressed by formal policies (Lindsjö *et al.*, 2020; Msangi *et al.*, 2024).

4.2 Evolution of Tanzania’s Policy Environment for Youth Employment in Agriculture

The systematic review identified 18 policy documents spanning 1996 to 2024 that explicitly or implicitly address

Figure 4 visualises the policy implementation gap by comparing NSYIA objectives (2016) with documented outcomes (2021) across five key domains.

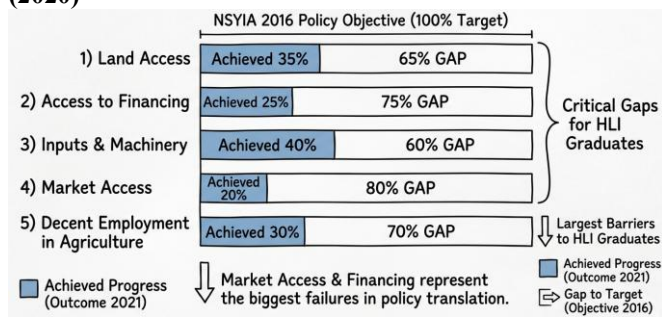
Table 4: Key Policy Milestones for Youth Employment in Tanzanian Agriculture (1996–2024)

Year	Policy/Programme	Key Provisions for Youth in Agriculture
1996	National Investment Promotion Policy	Emphasised agriculture’s role in employment creation; promoted R&D and extension services
2002	Small & Medium Enterprise Development Policy	Strengthened extension services for rural industrialisation; facilitated technology transfer
2005–2010	NSGRP I & II	Improved access to inputs, extension, mechanisation, agro-processing; targeted decent work for youth
2007	National Youth Employment Action Plan (NYEAP)	Promoted agro-processing industries; directed resources to pro-youth labour-intensive sectors
2007	National Youth Development Policy	Established Youth Development Fund (5% LGA + 5% central government contribution)
2013	National Agriculture Policy	Created enabling environment for youth; included “Employment and Decent Work in Agriculture” section
2016–2021	National Strategy for Youth Involvement in Agriculture (NSYIA)	Ten specific youth outcomes including land access, financing, inputs, irrigation, markets, climate adaptation
2015–2025	CCM Election Manifestos (2015, 2020)	Committed to attracting youth as agricultural entrepreneurs and commercial farmers
2022–2030	Building a Better Tomorrow (BBT-YIA)	Flagship programme targeting 12,000 enterprises across 12,000 villages; Agenda 10/30

Source: Authors’ compilation from URT (1996, 2002, 2007a, 2007b, 2013, 2016), CCM (2015, 2020), and URT/MoA (n.d.)



Figure 4: NSYIA (2016–2021) implementation gap analysis based on Lunogelo *et al.* (2017) and URT/MoA (2020)



Source: Authors' construction

Figure 4 demonstrates that across all five domains, actual outcomes fell far short of NSYIA objectives, with the largest gaps in market access (80% gap) and financing (75% gap). These findings suggest that while Tanzania has made significant progress in *policy formulation* for youth agricultural employment, the translation from policy to practice remains severely constrained by inadequate resourcing, weak coordination, and persistent informal institutional barriers.

4.3 Youth Employment in Tanzania's Agricultural Sector

Despite the policy gaps documented above, agriculture remains the single largest employer of Tanzanian youth. Table 5 presents current estimates of youth employment in agriculture.

Table 5: Youth Employment in Tanzanian Agriculture (2020/21)

Indicator	Percentage	Source
Youth (15–35 years) employed in agriculture	54.9%	NBS (2022)
Tanzania Mainland youth in agriculture	55.6%	NBS (2022)
Male youth in agriculture (Mainland)	54.2%	NBS (2022)
Female youth in agriculture (Mainland)	57.1%	NBS (2022)
Youth (15–24 years) employed in rural areas	12.6% unemployment	NBS & OCGS (2021)

Source: NBS (2022) and NBS & OCGS (2021)

Table 5 shows that a majority of employed youth work in agriculture, with female youth participation slightly higher (57.1%) than male (54.2%). However, Open Mind Tanzania (2018) argues that despite agriculture's employment potential, youth interest remains low, especially among the more educated, with farming perceived as "a resort for the poor and uneducated." This finding directly supports the TPB construct of *attitude*: negative evaluations of farming as an occupation reduce intention to engage, even when objective employment opportunities exist (Ajzen, 1991).

The review identified multiple factors driving youth disengagement from agriculture, synthesised from Nyamba and Sanga (2022) and URT (2016): lack of capital, lack of knowledge, poor inputs supply, expensive input prices, lack of crop markets, poor selling units and low crop prices, lack of agricultural infrastructure, lack of land, and poor farm working tools. From an SLF perspective, these factors represent deficits across multiple capital assets: financial (no capital), human (low knowledge/skills), physical (poor tools, infrastructure), and natural (land).

4.4 Constraints to HLI Graduate Self-Employment in Agriculture

The systematic review identified five binding constraints that disproportionately affect HLI graduates seeking agricultural self-employment. These constraints operate across the three theoretical lenses of the integrated framework.

4.4.1 Land Access and Tenure Insecurity

Land is the most frequently cited constraint across all 64 documents. Msangi *et al.* (2024) report that limited land access, inequitable distribution, and disputes are among the most serious challenges in Tanzania. Lindsjö *et al.* (2020) add that increased life expectancy delays intergenerational land transfer, meaning youth wait longer to inherit land. For HLI graduates who lack family land or reside in urban areas, access is even more constrained. From an SLF perspective, this represents a severe *natural capital* deficit. From an Institutional Theory perspective, *informal institutions* (customary inheritance norms) override formal land policies, leaving youth landless despite policies promoting their access.

4.4.2 Limited Access to Affordable Credit

Formal financial institutions require collateral, typically land or housing, which most graduates do not own (URT/MoA, 2020). As shown in Figure 4, the financing gap between NSYIA objectives and outcomes was 75%. While the National Youth Development Fund (NYDF) exists, with LGAs contributing 5% of revenue and central government matching 5%, Chachage (2006) notes that funds are unreliable, limited in scale, and dependent on local government revenue performance. From a TPB perspective, *low perceived behavioural control* over accessing capital reduces graduates' intention to pursue agricultural self-employment.

4.4.3 Market Access and Infrastructure Deficits

Limited access to profitable markets, appropriate logistics facilities, packaging materials, and market information was identified as a major constraint (Mashindano *et al.*, 2013). For perishable horticultural crops, which offer the best returns for small-scale graduates, post-harvest losses can reach 30–40% without cold storage. The livestock sector, despite Tanzania ranking second in Africa for cattle (33.9 million head), faces critical shortages of appropriate infrastructure for domestic and foreign trade (MLF, 2022). From an SLF perspective, this represents a *physical capital* deficit.



4.4.4 Negative Attitudes and Low Motivation

University graduates, like most youth, do not perceive agriculture as decent employment (URT/MoA, 2020; Kafle *et al.*, 2019). Odira (2021) documents that agriculture is sometimes used as punishment in schools, with one key informant stating: “*I think the way agriculture is taken in schools sometimes can affect the mind-set of the student, for example, agriculture is used as a punishment for wrong doers.*” This finding is critical from a TPB perspective: *attitudes* toward farming are formed early and are predominantly negative, reinforced by social norms that valorise white-collar formal employment and devalue manual agricultural work.

4.4.5 Climate Change and Land Use Conflicts

Climate change disproportionately affects Tanzania's rain-fed agricultural systems, with increased drought and flood frequency (URT, 2017). Additionally, expanding cropped area has intensified farmer-herder conflicts, posing risks to investment and personal safety. From an SLF perspective, these represent *vulnerability context* shocks that reduce the expected returns to agricultural investment and deter risk-averse graduates.

4.5 Opportunities for HLI Graduate Self-Employment in Agriculture

Despite the constraints documented above, the review identified significant opportunities across crop value chains, livestock enterprises, and cross-cutting service sectors.

4.5.1 High-Value Crop Production

The horticulture sector offers advantages for graduates due to shorter growing cycles, high returns, and limited land requirements. Profitable crops include coloured sweet peppers, off-season tomatoes, onions, green beans, mushrooms, cut flowers, spices (vanilla, garlic, ginger), and avocado (Mashindano *et al.*, 2013). Agro-processing of traditional commodities, cassava and banana into flour, soybeans into soy milk and soy sauce, hides and skins into value-added products, also presents viable entry points.

4.5.2 Livestock Enterprises

Poultry production has particular potential, as consumers shift from red meat to white meat. The Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries (MLF, 2022) estimates that sufficient investment could close the white meat supply gap and generate a 35% surplus for export. Other opportunities include dairy, pig production, and emerging areas such as black soldier fly larvae production for animal feed, which converts low-quality organic waste into high-quality protein (Dörper *et al.*, 2020).

4.5.3 Cross-Cutting and Service Opportunities

Digital agriculture solutions, farm management applications, e-extension platforms, market linkage systems, enable tech-savvy graduates to create agribusinesses without owning land (FAO, CTA & IFAD, 2014). Contract farming can reduce price and marketing risks by providing upfront inputs and assured markets (Sahota, 2013). Organic farming

responds to growing global demand for naturally grown foods, with premium pricing (Tandon, 2022).

4.5.4 Enabling Programmes

The Building a Better Tomorrow: Youth Initiative for Agribusiness (BBT-YIA) 2022–2030 aims to establish 12,000 profitable enterprises across 12,000 villages, contributing to Agenda 10/30 (increasing youth employment by 1 million and achieving 10% agricultural growth by 2030) (URT/MoA, n.d.). Internship programmes, including SUGECO's Israel and USA placements, have exposed over 125 youth to advanced agribusiness technologies and practices (Donge & Urassa, 2022; SUGECO, 2023). However, the review finds that these programmes remain small-scale relative to need.

4.6 Synthesis: *The Policy-to-Practice Gap for HLI Graduates*

The results and discussion reveal a consistent pattern across four decades: Tanzania has developed a comprehensive formal policy architecture for youth employment in agriculture, but implementation remains weak. From an Institutional Theory perspective, the gap arises because formal institutions (policies, strategies, programmes) are not adequately resourced or enforced, while informal institutions (land inheritance norms, social devaluation of farming, gender biases) remain largely untouched by policy reforms. From a TPB perspective, even when objective opportunities exist, negative attitudes, subjective norms favouring formal employment, and low perceived behavioural control (due to land, credit, market, and climate constraints) suppress graduates' intention to pursue agricultural self-employment. From an SLF perspective, graduates enter with high human capital but deficient natural, financial, and physical capital, a combination that cannot sustain viable agricultural enterprises without deliberate enabling interventions.

Therefore, answering the paper's central question, *Can four decades of agricultural reforms deliver youth self-employment for HLI graduates?*, the evidence suggests: *not yet, but potentially yes*. The potential exists in high-value crops, livestock, digital services, and contract farming. However, realising that potential requires closing the policy-to-practice gap through land tenure reform, graduate-friendly financial products, market infrastructure investment, and structured mindset-change interventions embedded in university curricula.

5.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

After four decades of economic reforms that have progressively liberalised Tanzania's agricultural sector, this systematic review set out to answer a pressing policy question: can agriculture deliver viable self-employment pathways for higher learning institution graduates? The evidence synthesised from 64 documents spanning 1984 to 2024 provides a nuanced but cautiously optimistic answer: the potential exists, yet the persistent gap between policy



intention and implementation remain unacceptably wide. Empirically, this study contributes the first integrated application of the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework, Theory of Planned Behaviour, and Institutional Theory to explain why HLI graduates, despite possessing high human capital, consistently fail to translate agricultural opportunities into self-employment outcomes. The findings reveal that graduates enter the agricultural sector with severe deficits in natural capital (landlessness), financial capital (inability to provide collateral for credit), and physical capital (lack of storage, processing, and market infrastructure). Simultaneously, their high human capital is mismatched with the practical, employable skills required for agribusiness success, a mismatch that Tanzania's theoretically heavy university curricula have failed to address.

The empirical evidence further demonstrates that negative attitudes toward farming, reinforced by deeply embedded social norms that devalue agricultural work and by schooling practices that use agriculture as punishment, combine with low perceived behavioural control over land access, credit availability, and climate risks to suppress graduates' intention to pursue agricultural careers. From a policy perspective, these findings carry profound implications. Tanzania has developed a dense formal policy architecture, including the National Strategy for Youth Involvement in Agriculture (NSYIA 2016–2021) and the flagship Building a Better Tomorrow initiative (BBT-YIA 2022–2030), which prioritise agricultural transformation and youth employment. However, this review documents implementation gaps of 60–80 percent across critical domains such as land access, financing, and market development. Therefore, the first policy imperative is a fundamental shift from policy formulation to policy enforcement. This requires binding targets with annual progress reviews, dedicated and ring-fenced budget lines, and accountability mechanisms that link ministry performance directly to measurable youth employment outcomes.

Land tenure reform emerges as the single most critical intervention requiring urgent policy action. Without secure land rights, including youth-specific leasing arrangements, government-managed land banks, and formal recognition of group tenure for youth agribusiness collectives, graduates cannot use land as collateral to access credit, cannot invest in long-term productivity-enhancing improvements such as irrigation infrastructure, and remain trapped in rain-fed, low-productivity systems that are increasingly vulnerable to climate shocks. Policy must directly address the informal institutional barriers that delay intergenerational land transfer, including customary inheritance norms that leave youth landless well into their thirties. Specific policy mechanisms could include land titling programmes with mandatory youth quotas, expedited legal aid for youth land dispute resolution, and pilot programmes that allocate

underutilised village land to registered youth agribusiness groups.

Financial product innovation represents a second urgent policy frontier. Commercial banks' traditional collateral requirements effectively exclude virtually all HLI graduates from formal agricultural credit. The government should mandate that financial institutions develop graduate-friendly products, including collateral-free youth agribusiness loans with extended grace periods, government-backed credit guarantee schemes that absorb first-loss risk, and formal linkages between formal banks and village savings and loan associations. The National Youth Development Fund, currently capitalised through unpredictable local government revenue contributions, must be scaled up substantially and placed on a predictable, centrally appropriated footing. Market infrastructure investment, particularly cold storage facilities for perishable horticultural products, rural aggregation centres, and last-mile transport links, would directly address the 80 percent implementation gap in market access documented in this review, stabilising prices and reducing post-harvest losses that currently erode graduate profitability.

Curriculum reform in higher learning institutions is an equally essential policy lever. Universities must move beyond theoretical instruction to embed practical agribusiness training, mandatory internship placements, and structured mentorship from successful young agripreneurs. The Sokoine University Graduate Entrepreneurs Cooperative model, which combines classroom training with international internship placements in Israel and the United States, demonstrates what is possible but remains far too small in scale. Finally, mindset change interventions, including national media campaigns showcasing successful graduate agripreneurs, elimination of punitive farming practices in schools, and establishment of peer mentoring networks, can shift the negative attitudes and subjective norms that currently deter educated youth from agriculture. Theoretically, this paper has demonstrated that integrating SLF, TPB, and Institutional Theory provides a robust analytical lens for understanding graduate self-employment transitions in low-income agricultural contexts, with applicability well beyond Tanzania to other sub-Saharan African countries facing similar youth employment challenges. For Tanzania, the way forward is clear: four decades of reforms have created the policy foundation, but the next decade must focus relentlessly on implementation, enforcement, and institutional realignment. Without this fundamental shift, agriculture will remain a sector of last resort for the educated youth who most urgently need dignified, profitable, and sustainable employment.



Declaration of Conflict of Interest

We hereby declare that there are no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the research and findings presented in this paper.

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