

President Paul Kagame has urged young Africans to look beyond farming and explore opportunities across the food value chain, saying the sector offers room for businesses and jobs from agricultural production to the final consumer.

Kagame made the remarks Thursday during a dialogue with young African entrepreneurs at the Africa Food Systems Forum 2026 in Kigali, where participants asked him about investment, access to finance, employment and the future of Africa's food systems.

He said young entrepreneurs should look at gaps across the chain, including agricultural inputs, technology, irrigation, storage, transport, processing and access to markets.

"There is a chain of things you could think about," Kagame said. "If I had the opportunity at that time as an entrepreneur, I would look from the farm all the way to the final consumer or the market."



He was responding to a question from 28-year-old Zambian entrepreneur Imungana Malikana, who asked where a young entrepreneur could focus to find opportunities in Africa's food economy and compete in regional and international markets.

Kagame said the opportunities extend beyond individual countries and encouraged young people to identify areas that match their skills and interests.

The discussion also highlighted one of the major obstacles facing young entrepreneurs: access to capital.

Tanzanian entrepreneur Musa Mishamo, 34, founder and chief executive of Lada Asali 60, told Kagame that many young Africans have innovative ideas that could transform agriculture but struggle to turn them into businesses because they lack capital and collateral.

"The unfortunate thing is that much of the financial system on our continent is built in a way that largely provides capital to people who already have capital," Kagame said.

He said governments should find ways to support entrepreneurs who have the ability to work but cannot easily access financing.

“Government should find a way to intervene so that those with little capital, or those who cannot easily access it, can have an opportunity to do something,” he said.

Kagame cited the Rwanda Development Board as an example of how government and partners can help entrepreneurs who have the capacity to invest but lack sufficient capital.

He said such support can eventually benefit the wider economy as businesses grow, repay financing, create jobs and generate income.

The role of food systems in creating employment was also raised by Farida Baria Mustafa, a 24-year-old entrepreneur from Ghana who runs a business that processes fruit waste into oil.

She asked what governments could do to make agriculture and food systems a stronger source of jobs for young people as millions enter the labour market each year.

Kagame said the importance of food goes beyond agriculture because it is closely linked to human life and economic activity.

“Food is more than a human right. It is life itself. People cannot function properly without food,” he said.

He said strengthening food systems requires attention to the entire chain, from production and processing to storage, transport and markets.

Lydia Murekatete, co-founder of All Greens, a business involved in greenhouse vegetable farming, asked Kagame what young African leaders and entrepreneurs could learn from Rwanda’s development experience.

Kagame said leadership and problem-solving are not responsibilities reserved for a few people.

“Everyone has the ability. Everyone can be a leader if they want to be,” he said.

He urged young people to begin by examining their own challenges before trying to solve problems affecting others.

“Before you decide to go and solve problems that are out there, first examine yourself,” Kagame said.

He said developing that ability at a young age can help people learn how to identify priorities and tackle increasingly complex problems as they grow.

The dialogue was part of the Africa Food Systems Forum 2026 in Kigali, which brought young entrepreneurs into discussions on how Africa can strengthen its food systems and expand opportunities for its growing youth population.