

Transforming Agricultural Education into Enterprise and Employment: Documenting Youth and Enterprise Transitions at Mohammed VI Polytechnic University

By the TAGDev 2.0 Team

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Introduction

The question of what young Africans will do with their education has become one of the defining development challenges of the present era. The continent has the youngest population in the world, and each year several million young people enter labour markets that are unable to absorb them into formal, productive employment. Agriculture and its associated value chains represent one of the few sectors with the scale to respond, yet they have too often been perceived by graduates as a domain of last resort rather than opportunity. Closing the distance between education and decent work therefore requires more than the expansion of enrolment. It requires institutions capable of accompanying young people through the difficult transitions from study into enterprise, from ideas into viable businesses, and from individual ambition into collective economic activity.

Universities occupy a decisive position in this respect, because the transition from education to livelihood is not automatic and rarely occurs through teaching alone. It depends on financing, mentorship, networks, exposure to markets and, critically, on the removal of the financial barriers that prevent talented young people from completing their studies at all. In Morocco, Mohammed VI Polytechnic University (UM6P), through the TAGDev 2.0 programme coordinated by RUFORUM and funded by the Mastercard Foundation, has assembled a set of instruments designed to support precisely these transitions. This article documents the evidence of those transitions — among students, start-ups, cooperatives and vocational-training youth — and considers what they reveal about how higher education can be connected more effectively to employment and enterprise.

Institutional Context

UM6P approaches the education-to-employment transition as an integrated process rather than a sequence of discrete activities. Scholarships remove financial barriers to access; incubation and mentorship convert ideas into ventures; leadership platforms cultivate agency and networks; and outreach to cooperatives and vocational-training institutions extends opportunity beyond the university's own students. Understood together, these instruments constitute a deliberate architecture for supporting transitions, and the evidence generated across the current cycle allows their contribution to be assessed with some precision. What follows is an account of that evidence, organised around the principal pathways through which young people and enterprises are moving towards economic participation.

From Incubation to Enterprise

The clearest evidence of enterprise transition comes from UM6P's Agri-Food Tech Incubator, whose fourth cohort ran from November 2025 to June 2026. The programme attracted 89 applications, from which 44 teams were interviewed by a seven-member committee and 38 start-ups were selected. Over eight months, entrepreneurs benefited from eight specialised training sessions, approximately thirty mentoring sessions and the support of more than twenty mentors and industry experts, structured around three bootcamps and culminating in a Demo Day held on 27 June 2026 at the UM6P Business Center in Benguerir, where ten finalist ventures presented to investors and ecosystem partners. These figures matter because they describe not an isolated event but a structured pipeline through which early-stage ideas are progressively tested, refined and prepared for the market.

The significance of the incubator is most apparent in the trajectories of individual ventures. INBAT, an agritech enterprise, is now supporting twenty-seven active farms, and reports that its users have achieved an average thirty-five per cent increase in production while reducing data-entry time from twenty-five minutes to twenty seconds; the venture has recorded full conversion and renewal rates among its users and was recognised as the Best Youth Startup in Africa at the African CIO Awards, in addition to representation at GITEX Africa and the United Nations Science, Technology and Innovation Forum in New York. Green Leaf AI, working on artificial-intelligence tools to protect date palms, has assembled a dataset of more than 2,200 annotated field images, has been recognised among the IRCAI Top 100 Artificial Intelligence Solutions for the Sustainable Development Goals under the auspices of UNESCO, and has been named a WSIS Champion for 2025, with the stated ambition of protecting one million date palms and supporting some 8,500 farmers by 2030. Other ventures, including Kanouz Addar, which has formalised an agricultural cooperative around sustainable organic-waste management, and DIGIT HS, which has delivered a functional Internet-of-Things platform for precision agriculture and smart poultry farming, further illustrate the diversity of enterprises emerging from the programme.

What these cases demonstrate is that structured incubation can accelerate the transition from concept to operating enterprise, and that African agritech ventures are capable of achieving both commercial traction and international recognition. Their importance extends beyond the individual founders. Each venture that reaches the market contributes to the wider objective of positioning agriculture as a domain of innovation and dignified work, and each provides a demonstrable example that can influence the aspirations of other young people considering the sector.

Scholarships and the Economics of Access

Enterprise transitions are only possible when young people are able to complete their education in the first place, and for many of UM6P's students this would not have been possible without financial support. The TAGDev 2.0 scholarships, funded through RUFORUM and the Mastercard Foundation, address the most fundamental barrier to transition by covering tuition and living costs for talented students from financially constrained backgrounds. The testimonies of scholarship recipients illustrate the consequences of that support with unusual clarity.

“Receiving the TAGDev 2.0 Scholarship lifted a tremendous burden from both my family and me. Before joining TAGDev 2.0, I had never imagined myself taking an interest in agriculture, let alone African agriculture. I now see it as an area where I hope to contribute through research and innovation.” — Kenza Sadakni, MSc Collective Intelligence

Kenza Sadakni, a twenty-one-year-old student, joined the Master's in Collective Intelligence at a moment when her family's financial situation had deteriorated sharply; the scholarship enabled her to concentrate on her studies and to develop an emerging interest in applying her discipline to agricultural processes in Morocco. Maryem Gorbalmous, a first-year Master's student in the same field, describes the scholarship as a precondition for her continued study and as a foundation for future ambitions in research and entrepreneurship, observing that without it, continuing her studies at UM6P would simply not have been financially possible. Mariam Oukadour, one of four TAGDev scholars at the university, recounts how financial stability allowed her to broaden her engagement towards sustainability and the Sustainable Development Goals, including a project to produce biogas from organic waste. These accounts share a common structure: the removal of a financial barrier does not merely permit continuation of study, it expands the horizon of what students believe themselves capable of pursuing.

Leadership, Agency and Student Networks

Financial access, while necessary, is not sufficient; transitions also depend on the cultivation of agency, leadership and networks. The trajectory of Alae-Eddine Moumen, a Master's student in Agribusiness Innovation, illustrates how these elements combine. Having won second prize at the UM6P AgriChallenge, he was elected President of the Africa Business Unit, through which he engaged with established firms including McKinsey & Company, Microsoft, OCP, Procter & Gamble, CDG Invest and Africa50; he co-founded an agritech start-up oriented towards food security and farmer empowerment, and was subsequently appointed President of the Morocco TAGDev team, joining a guild of twelve student presidents from across the continent.

“This scholarship transformed my reality. The programme has freed my time and energy, allowing me to fully focus on my projects and build a profile that aligns with TAGDEV's mission of cultivating Africa's next generation of leaders.” — Alae-Eddine Moumen, MSc Agribusiness Innovation

The importance of such trajectories lies in what they reveal about the conditions for youth agency. Leadership platforms and continental networks provide young people with exposure, responsibility and connection that formal instruction cannot supply on its own. They also generate a multiplier effect, since students who assume leadership roles frequently become mentors and examples for their peers, extending the influence of the programme well beyond its direct beneficiaries.

Extending Opportunity to Cooperatives

Transitions are not confined to individual students; they also occur at the level of collective rural enterprise. Through its Social Innovation Lab, UM6P convened a hybrid webinar on agricultural entrepreneurship on 23 October 2025 in Benguerir, bringing together more than one hundred participants around financing mechanisms, product valorisation and cooperative governance. The webinar responded to a well-documented difficulty: many cooperatives, particularly in the aromatic and medicinal plants

sector, possess genuine economic potential but struggle to move from artisanal production towards structured, revenue-generating enterprise. A complementary programme to train facilitators of the National Office for Agricultural Advisory (ONCA) is strengthening the durable support available to these cooperatives, in response to an economic-viability need expressed by more than seventy-one per cent of field actors.

This work is significant because the transition of cooperatives into competitive enterprises has implications for rural incomes, for women's economic participation and for the resilience of local food systems. By connecting cooperatives with expertise and by strengthening the advisory system that supports them, the university addresses a structural constraint that individual training alone cannot resolve, and it contributes to a more inclusive and sustainable pattern of rural development.

Digital Entrepreneurship for Vocational-Training Youth

A final pathway extends opportunity to young people within the vocational-training system, who are frequently excluded from university-based entrepreneurship support. Through the Nova Digital Hubs initiative, delivered in collaboration with TechnoServe at the Cité des Métiers et des Compétences of Beni Mellal-Khenifra within the OFPPT, two bootcamps in 2025 — held on 21 to 23 July and on 20 to 21 September — introduced students and aspiring project holders from Beni Mellal and the surrounding areas, many from farming families, to a free and self-paced digital entrepreneurship platform. Participants applied structured frameworks such as Simon Sinek's Golden Circle to their own projects, refined their value propositions and digital presence, presented their ideas to their peers, and gained access to online courses and certificates, with follow-up support arranged for those still at the ideation stage.

The relevance of this initiative lies in its inclusiveness and in its recognition that entrepreneurial capability should not be the preserve of university students alone. Vocational-training institutions reach a population that is often closer to informal economic activity and to rural production, and equipping these young people with digital and entrepreneurial tools extends the reach of the transition agenda into segments of the youth population that are frequently underserved. The bootcamp reports also candidly note that some participants remained at the idea stage, an observation that usefully tempers expectations and points towards the need for more selective recruitment and sustained follow-up.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

1. **Treat scholarships as enablers of transition, not only of access.** Financial support removes the barrier to entry, but its full value is realised when combined with mentorship, leadership platforms and enterprise support that convert access into outcomes.
2. **Sustain structured incubation with market exposure.** The incubator's results suggest that combining training, mentorship and investor engagement over an extended period is essential to move ventures from concept to commercial traction.
3. **Document and disseminate venture outcomes.** The achievements of ventures such as INBAT and Green Leaf AI provide credible evidence that can shape the aspirations of other young people and attract further investment; systematic documentation multiplies their value.

4. **Extend support to cooperatives and advisory systems.** Enterprise transition at the collective level requires strengthening the advisory ecosystem, since individual training cannot resolve structural constraints in financing and governance.
5. **Include vocational-training youth deliberately.** Initiatives such as Nova Digital Hubs demonstrate the value of reaching beyond university students, provided that recruitment prioritises project readiness and that follow-up mechanisms are in place.
6. **Match ambition with realistic selection.** The candid observation that some participants remained at the ideation stage indicates that impact is strengthened by targeting those with clearer project definition while offering preparatory support to others.
7. **Connect transitions to continental networks.** Leadership platforms that link students across the RUFORUM network amplify individual agency and should be maintained as a structural feature rather than an occasional opportunity.

Conclusion

The evidence of transition emerging from UM6P under TAGDev 2.0 describes a coherent effort to connect education with enterprise and employment across several distinct pathways. Scholarships enable talented students to complete their studies and to enlarge their ambitions; structured incubation moves ventures from idea to market and, in several cases, to international recognition; leadership platforms cultivate agency and networks; and outreach to cooperatives and vocational-training youth extends opportunity beyond the university's own walls. These transitions remain early and uneven, and the honest documentation of their limits is itself a mark of seriousness. Yet the direction is clear. Taken together, they indicate how a university can function not merely as a site of instruction but as an institution that accompanies young people and enterprises through the difficult passage into economic participation — a role of considerable relevance to the wider ambition of transforming African higher education into an engine of decent work and inclusive growth.