FAO supports youth’s role in sustainable development

Youth drives innovation. In the agricultural sector as in any other, more creative change has come from youth than from any other demographic. And with innovation comes social change. Youth will forge the future and that future must be sustainable. In the last quarter of 2017 FAO project’s “Building coalition with youth in sustainable development through agriculture, forestry, and fisheries” promoted sustainable agriculture among youth in Nepal, the Philippines and Viet Nam. The project, funded by RAP, used different approaches to take a snapshot of the current agricultural demographic picture, provide seed funds, and conduct capacity building workshops. The stories that came out of the project are the stories of success for youth and by youth, working with FAO.

The context and the trends

The Asia-Pacific region is home to 60 percent of the world’s youth population. The 700 million people aged 15 to 24 living in Asia and the Pacific are a potent force for social change. They are not only an invaluable resource for the future, they are the future. But the trend of ongoing out-migration to urban centers or other countries have to be reversed to feed the future. Out migration is seen by youth as a way to manage the many socio-economic challenges that marginalize them: unemployment, forced migration, and inadequate access to social services among others. As a corollary trend, farming is increasingly unpopular as a lifestyle and career choice among youth. In striving for a sustainable future, FAO is promoting sustainable agricultural food systems. In all three of the site countries, out-migration for paid labour is a problem that has resulted in a lack of skilled farming labour and which has a long-term negative impact if left unchecked. FAO is working to support youth to take control of their own solutions to the future of their world.

Nepal: Addressing youth out-migration

Agriculture as a vital component of the Nepali culture, Nepal has historically maintained a strong agricultural sector but in recent years the need for or the dream of highly-paid employment has resulted in a migration overseas: as much as 10% of the working population leaving farming and now working abroad. FAO has worked with youth to foster their involvement in agriculture, generate income and boost agricultural productivity in the community.

Bishnu Parajuli along with her husband has been involved in cow farming in Sunawal, Nawalparasi. Bishnu’s husband returned from Malaysia with a dream to start an agriculture-based enterprise. They applied for a loan to buy 17 cows of different sizes. Now, they earn their living by selling milk in the nearby market. They see potential to expand their dairy but they are hindered by a lack of financing. FAO’s support is aimed at upgrading their temporary cowshed along with facilities that would allow Bishnu and her husband to increase the size of the herd and its milk production.

[video] The Results: Providing infrastructure for milk production
The Philippines: Innovation and creativity fuel up the youth

Worn-out jeans, old shoes, electric fans, and car tires are just a few of the recyclable materials which youth leaders from Los Baños, Philippines used to create small gardens. These otherwise unused materials are now used to plant vegetables in their homes and schools. The harvest from these innovative home gardens, like onions, lettuce, eggplants, etc., helped serve dinner on the table for their families. Moreover, through this project, students from a local public school were able to convert an abandoned schoolyard into a garden. Working in the school garden during the school days is an interesting activity for them. The garden serves not only as a scientific research laboratory but also feeds into the school’s nutrition program.

[video] The results: Seed money for small holder gardens

Viet Nam: Competing towards an integrated and productive farming

Fewer and fewer Vietnamese youth are choosing to work as farmers. To provide a creative space for new thinking about what farming is and how it contributes to the society, and to raise awareness about sustainable agriculture, FAO has launched a competition in Viet Nam to call for innovative ideas in agriculture and sustainable development. Out of the 22 proposals that were submitted, FAO selected two small projects to provide initial support for its implementation: 1) Husbandry of super-lean pigs and free-range chickens and cultivation of agricultural crops and tree species, and 2) Youth cooperatives in the production of safe unseasonal vegetables. The project also created a network of young farmers in Bac Kan province. The members share ideas and experiences, and demonstrate sustainable agricultural initiatives through field excursions.

[video] The results: Capacity building in new areas of produce and networking among youth farmers
Youth’s contribution to achieving larger societal goals

The outcome of “Building coalition with youth in sustainable development through agriculture, forestry, and fisheries” in the Philippines, Nepal, and Viet Nam is a microcosm of the central role and potential of youth to drive change in the society. Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) depends on the participation and enthusiasm of youth farmers. Engaging them by providing opportunities in the agriculture and rural development sector will ensure their positive contribution to the sustainable future.