



FAO's work on decent rural employment

Decent work is defined as jobs that pay a living wage and offer reasonable and fair conditions. Lack of decent work in rural areas is a major cause of persistent poverty. Seventy five percent of the world's poor live in rural areas. Whether they are self-employed, family workers or wage earners, for these people, *labour* tends to be the most important source of income generation. However, their employment conditions are often uncertain and generate low earnings.

The challenges

Rural people's work is often hazardous to their health, leaving them unprotected from exposure to chemicals, or requiring long working hours. Occasional unemployment and structural underemployment reinforce low productivity and prevent workers from earning living wages, and are therefore a major cause of persistent rural poverty, food and nutrition insecurity and unsustainable use of natural resources.

Most rural youth are employed in agricultural activities, but the growing young labour force faces increasing difficulties in finding decent work opportunities in rural economies. Education levels have improved, but farm and off-farm economic activities do not generate enough jobs that match young people's enhanced skill levels. This situation is inducing more migration to cities, increasing the challenges to finding work in urban areas. The lack of economic opportunities for youth is also undermining social cohesion and threatening inclusive rural development.

Worldwide, of the children aged 5 to 17 years who work in hazardous circumstances, about 59 percent (70 million) are found in the agriculture sector. The challenges faced by child workers and youth without economic opportunities are a time bomb, with lifetime effects on the health and earning capacity of the affected young people, and possible repercussions on society at large.

What is FAO doing to address these challenges?

The Decent Rural Employment Team of the Social Protection Division leads FAO's work on decent rural employment, in close collaboration with the International Labour Organization. FAO's work in this area involves more than creating new employment opportunities or increasing the productivity of existing jobs in the agriculture sector. FAO also considers the whole range of factors that may hamper the opportunities for decent work in rural areas, such as weak enforcement of labour legislation; insecure and low incomes; poor health, safety and environmental conditions; gender inequality in pay and opportunities;

exploitation of migrant workers; inadequate social protection; and lack of social dialogue.

FAO works with partners to support governments and other national stakeholders in **improving the rural poor's access to decent farm and non-farm employment opportunities**, through:

- improving the design of strategies and policies for diversifying rural economies, to promote decent work creation and skills training for rural workers, especially youth and women;
- enhancing adherence to international labour standards – such as those for eliminating discrimination, ensuring occupational safety and health and preventing child labour – consistent with the overall improvement of rural livelihoods;
- strengthening the analysis of rural labour markets to enable better-informed policy decisions that promote increased and better job opportunities for the rural poor.

More specifically, FAO:

- has developed the integrated country approach for promoting decent rural employment, which aims to strengthen governments' capacity to formulate and implement agricultural and rural development policies, strategies and programmes that generate decent rural employment;
- assists the prevention of child labour in agriculture under the International Partnership for Cooperation on Child Labour in Agriculture, with activities at the global and national levels that include supporting national action plans to address child labour in agriculture;
- promotes the creation of jobs for rural youth by addressing both the supply and the demand sides of the rural labour market – on the supply side, FAO promotes the empowerment of rural youth through education and entrepreneurial skills development¹ and improved access to productive assets, business services and markets; on the demand side, it supports development of value chains and the private sector to increase and improve job opportunities for youth;
- provides technical assistance to governments to improve the application of international labour standards in rural areas, promoting the rights of the rural labour force in the informal economy.

How does this work help achieve FAO's Strategic Objectives?

¹ For example, through the Junior Farmer Field and Life Schools (JFFLS) approach.

FAO's Strategic Objectives (SOs) aim to support governments and stakeholders in eliminating hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition (SO1); making agriculture more productive and sustainable (SO2); reducing rural poverty (SO3); making agriculture and food systems inclusive and efficient (SO4); and protecting livelihoods from disasters (SO5).

Promoting decent rural employment has a multiplier effect as it increases living standards for present and future generations, thereby leading to sustainable and inclusive economic growth. Improved incomes have direct impacts on rural poverty and food access, and on people's capacity to cope with risks. Consideration of the quality as well as the quantity of new work opportunities will help ensure greater social and environmental sustainability, resulting in more inclusive and efficient food and agriculture systems.

Further reading and materials

- *Decent rural employment for food security: A case for action* - <http://bit.ly/1axH9TA>
- *Guidance on how to address rural employment and decent work concerns in FAO country activities* - <http://bit.ly/1d0Jm6d>
- *FAO-ILO Guidance on addressing child labour in fisheries and aquaculture* - <http://bit.ly/1hil1xL>
- *Children's work in the livestock sector: Herding and beyond* - <http://bit.ly/1dpLzhB>
- *Gender and rural employment: Differentiated pathways out of poverty* [www] - <http://bit.ly/1dpLzhB>
- *Promoting employment and entrepreneurship for youths in West Bank and Gaza Strip* - <http://bit.ly/L1Y875>
- *Guidelines for addressing decent rural employment in the Country Programming Framework* - <http://bit.ly/L1Y875>
- *Quick Guidelines on how to mainstream decent rural employment into project formulation* - <http://bit.ly/1gAoKpJ>
- *News from the web series* [www] - <http://bit.ly/L1YCu0>