Promoting alternatives to migration for rural youth in Tunisia and Ethiopia
Each year, rural areas lose a significant share of their workforce, as youth leave their homes and migrate to cities or move abroad in search of a better future. Poverty, food insecurity and a lack of employment opportunities push many young men and women around the world to search for jobs elsewhere, often facing several risks during the journey.

In Africa, where youth under-employment and unemployment rates are particularly high, many young people move away from rural areas, also because they do not perceive agriculture as an attractive and remunerative sector. Yet, agriculture has the potential to generate much needed job opportunities for self-employment and seasonal wage labour.

At the same time, safe, orderly and regular migration can contribute to the rural development of origin, transit and destination countries. Migrants can fuel progress, spark innovations and transfer knowledge, skills and technology. Furthermore, investing in farm and off-farm activities part of the remittances sent by migrants to their rural areas of origin can support agricultural transformations. This, in turn, can create a virtuous circle of employment creation and inclusive growth.

Precisely by addressing the links between migration and rural development, FAO is making a difference in Tunisia and Ethiopia, two countries that are particularly prone to rural out-migration of youth.
With funding from the Italian Development Cooperation, the two-year FAO project on Youth mobility, food security and rural poverty reduction (abbreviated as “RYM” – Rural Youth Mobility) was launched in 2015 to address the main drivers of rural migration of youth in Tunisia and Ethiopia, while at the same time harnessing the development potential of migratory movements.

Although Tunisia and Ethiopia present structural differences in terms of agricultural employment, extreme poverty and food insecurity, they have similar demographic profiles and face considerable challenges in creating employment opportunities for rural youth.

In both countries, migration is a widespread livelihood strategy and migratory flows are characterised by significant internal movements of people. Data indicate that about 70 percent of Tunisian internal migrants are youth. In Ethiopia, migratory movements present a marked seasonal dimension linked to the agricultural calendars and rural-rural migrants account for 34 percent of the total migrants’ population. Rural-urban migration is increasing as well.

Through the RYM Project, FAO analysed the drivers and patterns of rural migrations in the two countries and enhanced governments’ capacity to better address migration issues in the context of rural development and vice versa.

Working closely with national stakeholders, FAO also promoted innovative pathways for decent youth employment and agricultural entrepreneurship in Tunisian and Ethiopian areas prone to migration.

In particular, the RYM Project provided unemployed youth with training and equipment, helping them launch their own small agricultural enterprises, also by productively investing the remittances received from the diaspora. While working side by side with youth in rural areas, FAO boosted financial literacy and raised awareness about the risks of irregular migration.
The **impact** of the Project is already being felt. The young farmers and entrepreneurs involved have regained hope and confidence in their capacity to work and be productive in their own homeland. As shown by the testimonies collected in this publication, now migration is not perceived as the only viable option left for moving out of poverty.

The **success factors** of the RYM interventions lied in addressing the specific hurdles that youth face when establishing their own economic activities, both as individuals and as part of an association. In both countries, these **barriers** are: limited access to land, credit, market and technical training, which bring a consequent lack of hope in the future. While helping youth overcome these constraints, the Project tailored its general approach and activities to **local needs** and context specificities.

For instance, in Ethiopia, the close participation of the decentralized bureaus of the Ministry of Agriculture and the involvement of the target rural communities allowed to identify **unused land** that was made available to Project beneficiaries. In Tunisia, the institutionalization of the role of the “**agricultural coach**” (**accompagnateur agricole**) and the reinforcement of the agricultural enterprise incubators (as proximity services for rural youth) allowed to meet the needs of youth and guide them during the implementation of their projects. In particular, the coaches provided technical support to the young agricultural entrepreneurs, sustained their engagement and navigated them through the administrative requirements to set up their productive activities. The strong emphasis placed on the involvement of the young beneficiaries in the selection of products and the planning of activities ensured the **local ownership** of the initiative.

By addressing constraints that are universal in nature, such as access to skills, credit, inputs, and markets, RYM set up an approach which is highly **replicable** in other regions and countries. Furthermore, the involvement of the diaspora and the rural communities as a whole in the implementation of the productive activities, as well as the creation of a permanent team of agricultural coaches, ensure the **sustainability** of the approach in the long run.

The following pages describe the impact of RYM on rural communities in Tunisia and Ethiopia, through the voice of the **young protagonists**.

www.fao.org/rural-employment/work-areas/migration/rym-project
Many Tunisian rural youth migrate to cities or to nearby countries in Europe and in the Middle East, searching for work opportunities. With more than 1.2 million Tunisians living abroad, Tunisia has long been a prime emigration country in the Mediterranean region.

In Tunisia, RYM selected a total of 50 agricultural project ideas submitted by unemployed young women and men and youth organizations, through a call for proposals. The call sought innovative project proposals with the potential to generate farm and off-farm employment opportunities in rural areas. Gender balance was encouraged by providing specific incentives to young women entrepreneurs.

As a result, 19 youth (8 men and 11 women), 5 agricultural service associations and one agricultural and fisheries development group were selected in south-eastern Tunisia (Médenine, Tataouine and Gabès). In the North-West (Béja, Jendouba, Le Kef and Siliana), 24 youth (12 men and 12 women) and one agricultural development group were selected.

The most innovative projects were sustained by RYM with in-kind contributions and personalized technical training and coaching. This allowed the young farmers and entrepreneurs to establish their small enterprises, access credit and market their products, also by leveraging the financial contributions sent by the diaspora.

A team of nine accompagnateurs agricoles (agricultural coaches) was established and reinforced to guide the implementation of the selected projects along their entire business cycle and to guarantee their long-term sustainability.

It has been estimated that the resulting small agricultural enterprises have benefitted more than 500 individuals through the creation of direct and indirect jobs.
Scan this QRCode and watch the video on the RYM Project in Tunisia:
https://youtu.be/mI8Uyn0BeBI
Said Touati

WHERE
Tajerouine, Kef Governorate, Tunisia

WHAT
Sheep breeding

Scan this QR Code and watch the video interview with Said: https://youtu.be/2Hzxv2G_2kU
Said looks at his new-born lambs with relief and happiness, surrounded by a breath-taking lunar landscape.

He lives with his 90-year-old mother in the village of Tajerouine, in a dry and remote area in the North-West of Tunisia, close to the border with Algeria.

“This area is isolated and half of its population left, but I stayed with some other hard workers,” Said explained.

Despite a university degree in mathematics, Said was unemployed for 12 years. He said he liked working with livestock, which he had learned from his father, but raising sheep required resources and “my financial situation was not good.”

Said felt that the only option left for him was to migrate to Italy, following other men from his community. “But I decided to stay in my country and my land. I live with my mother and I am the breadwinner in the house. I cannot leave her alone,” he said with tears in his eyes.

Thanks to the RYM Project, Said learned how to run an organic sheep farm and received a herd of 55 sheep.

“I had lost hope due to the unemployment in the region, but the FAO Project gave me a chance,” he said. His cousin, who lives abroad, also helped, by leasing part of his own land for use by Said in sheep breeding.

Now Said has the option to earn a living in his own community and migration no longer feels like the only viable pathway out of poverty.

“I want to have a lot of livestock and hire a lot of workers to give opportunities to my people.”
Hanen Talbi

WHERE
Ouled Taleb, Siliana Governorate, Tunisia

WHAT
Free-range poultry
“This project enabled me to go from a dream, from an idea, to something real”

When approaching the small house, Hanen can be seen laughing with her little brother and her parents in the yard. Hanen is a 25-year-old biologist living in Ouled Taleb, Siliana, one of the several areas in North-Western Tunisia that are particularly hard-hit by unemployment, low income and high rates of migration.

Hanen comes from a poor rural family, who invested in their children’s education as a pathway out of poverty. When the RYM project started in the region, Hanen had an option: applying her academic knowledge to agriculture, in her homeland.

Where she once saw a lack of opportunity, she now sees great potential.

With the support of RYM, Hanen has launched her own free-range poultry farming business. The Project has provided her with a poultry kit, 500 eggs incubator and the necessary technical support to launch her business.

“FAO was crucial for my project. It enabled me to go from a dream, from an idea, to something concrete and real.” Hanen said.

Hanen has very clear objectives with respect to the technical development of her production. “For the moment I am farming naturally, but I will switch to biological farming,” she said.

She is currently building her network of buyers and is already able to generate an income from the sale of live birds and eggs.

Her plan is also to reinvest the money to reach a production of 1,500 eggs every 21 days, gradually expanding the business. This will allow her to hire more people in her farm and support her family.
Mohamed Baaka

WHERE
Sidi Makhfouf,
Médenine Governorate,
Tunisia

WHAT
Quail farming

VIDEO
Scan this QRCode and watch the video interview with Mohamed:
https://youtu.be/kOUwYYBndii
Sidi Makhlouf sits in the Governorate of Médenine, in the middle of the Tunisian Djeffara coastal plain. This rural village swept by the warm breezes of the shehili is home to 35-year-old Mohamed Baaka.

As many young people of his region, Mohamed could not find a job, despite his university degree in informatics and multimedia. Part of his family migrated abroad looking for a better life, but Mohamed decided to stay and to bet on the agricultural sector. After his university studies, he took part in a training on quail farming and created his own quail breeding unit in Sidi Makhlouf.

Now Mohammed is more hopeful for the future. “Why? Because FAO responded to my needs, mainly in terms of information and education. For instance, FAO provided me with trainings on how to communicate and how to carry out a market analysis”.

Thanks to a production capacity of about 48,000 quail per year, Mohamed currently manages to cover the needs of the Médenine area, contributing to the growth of the quail farming sector in the South of Tunisia.

Thanks to the RYM Project, Mohamed has also learned how to reinvest in his business the remittances that he receives from relatives abroad. This means that the entire project is fully self-funded and sustainable, with a substantial contribution of the diaspora, and there is no need for credit.

“I would like to give a piece of advice to those who feel that things are not going well,” Mohamed said. “We need to think differently, out of the box. We shouldn’t think about leaving, because we have the potential to achieve in our country something even better than what we want to do in other countries.”
Sonia Mhamdi

WHERE
Amdoum, Béja Governorate, Tunisia

WHAT
Manufacturing of food products and spices for traditional cuisine
Sonia’s little shop, scented with spices and herbs, looks like a magical alchemic lab, lost among the streets of the sand-fringed village of Amdoun, in the Governorate of Béja.

Not long ago, Sonia was considering leaving her family behind and migrating abroad in search of work. As many other locals, she and her family were low on income and struggling to support their three children.

Instead, she has found a new livelihood in the manufacturing of food products and local spices for Tunisian traditional cuisine that, laced with herbs and a hit of spice, combines Mediterranean and Middle Eastern flavours.

“I sincerely started with only 20 Dinars” Sonia said. “FAO has provided me with the spice and chili grinder for the transformation and commercialization of local products. Now I work with my husband, my sister, and my sister-in-law.”

The RYM Project provided Sonia also with technical expertise and business management skills. The project is anchored in the understanding that women and girls are critical agents in the fight against rural poverty, especially when their productive and entrepreneurial capacities are increased.

“As soon as I launched my project, I obtained a training certificate in spices and dried fruits grinding. After that, I undertook another training in Tabarka on the production of food for traditional cuisine.”

Sonia shared this new knowledge with her family members and, together with her husband, developed a network of agricultural producers, mainly women, who supply raw materials to be processed.

“With my project, I have managed to offer employment opportunities to women” Sonia said. “When I say women, I do not mean women holding a degree, but poor women who are really in need and who are not graduates. Their only degrees are their arms and their hands. If they work, they have a livelihood. If they don’t work, they cannot eat.”
Imen Chelbi

WHERE
Hassi Jerbi, Médenine Governorate, Tunisia

WHAT
Aloe Vera farming and manufacturing

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Once, living in Europe was my dream. Now, thanks to FAO, my project in my village is a dream come true.

35-year-old Imen Chelbi lives with her husband and their two children in Hassi Jerbi, a village dotted with clumps of palms and acacia trees, between the gleaming waters of the Gulfs of Gabès and Boughrara, in southeastern Tunisia.

In 2010, Imen and her family migrated to France looking for job opportunities. Imen and her husband lived there for seven years, before they decided to return to their hometown.

Now, Imen is standing tall in front of her one-hectare field of Aloe Vera, a wonder medicinal plant which is largely used in the cosmetic and health industry. Her passion for horse riding allowed her to discover the virtues of this plant also for equine medical treatments.

With the support of RYM, Imen was able to buy and install a drip irrigation system for her field of Aloe Vera. She also built a laboratory for the extraction and manufacturing of oil and gel from the leaves of Aloe.

Thanks to the marketing and communication skills acquired during her university career, Imen launched her own brand, Mon Aleo, which is rapidly growing and can currently count on 5 young employees, contracted periodically for harvesting, extracting the oil and packaging the final products.

In October 2017, Imen promoted her line of products at the FAO stand in the International Fair of Agriculture, Agricultural Machinery and Fishing (SIAMAP), held in Tunis. Thanks to this experience, she was able to establish contacts with buyers at national level and increase her clients’ base.

Driven by her strong determination, Imen also managed to get an agreement with four foreign investors from France, who believed in the potential of her products. As a result, in March 2017, her gel of Aloe was presented at the Salon du cheval in Paris, as a remedy for horses.

Given the success of her gel, Imen is currently planning to expand her business to other African countries.

“I am happy to realize my dream in my own country,” Imen said. “I am working to change my future.”
In Ethiopia, job creation has not matched the economic growth. About 71 percent of Ethiopia’s population is under the age of 30 and many of them lack opportunities to make a living.

To promote decent employment opportunities for rural youth and thus providing them with profitable alternatives to migration, RYM established 13 youth groups bringing together a total of 204 young women and men in the Amhara Region (South Wollo Zone, Kalu Woreda), and 25 youth groups bringing together a total of 250 young women and men in the Oromia Region (Bale Zone, Ghinir Woreda).

The regional bureaus of the Ministry of Agriculture have provided technical trainings tailored to the needs of the youth groups in the two regions, promoting selected agricultural and livestock rearing activities with market potential. The young beneficiaries have also received in-kind contributions in the form of agricultural inputs.

The groups started different business activities, such as horticulture, dairy, goat, sheep and poultry production, fattening, fishing, and beekeeping. Through RYM, some of the young agricultural entrepreneurs also benefitted from the concession of unused land from the decentralised governments.

While supporting the creation of small agricultural enterprises, RYM has established partnerships with local administrative authorities, training institutions and rural communities, which have contributed to develop a sense of ownership and engagement at local level.
Zinetemam Adem

WHERE
Mio Village, Amhara Region, Ethiopia

WHAT
Cattle fattening
I was about to migrate to find a job and have an income. I changed my mind and joined this initiative”

22-year-old Zinetemam Adem lives in Mio Village, in Amhara Region, where she lives with her three-year-old son.

Despite her young age, she has already had to handle difficult situations and make tough decisions. Out of school by grade 5, married at 18, and soon after with child, Zinetemam’s life had taken a wrong turn.

“My life was gradually getting worse. I returned to my parents with my two-year-old son. I was preparing to migrate just like any other girls in my village,” she said.

Young people in this part of Ethiopia migrate in mass to the Middle East looking for work and a better life.

Through the RYM Project, Zinetemam launched together with 11 other young people the Selam Cattle Fattening Enterprise, in January 2017. As part of RYM, the young people received trainings in rearing cattle and 18 oxen to start up their business.

The group is now planning to expand and diversify the business.

“I was about to migrate to find a job and have an income. I changed my mind and joined this initiative to work and change my life,” she said. “If I didn’t have this opportunity, I would have had to migrate.”
Yimam Ali

WHERE
Kalu,
Amhara Region,
Ethiopia

WHAT
Horticulture
28-year-old Yimam lives in Kalu district in Amhara Region, northern Ethiopia. Many young people like Yimam have been forced to migrate to other countries in search of work and a better life. In Yimam’s case it was Saudi Arabia.

“I was dependent on my parents. I didn’t earn enough to take care of my wife and child. I migrated to have enough money to support my family,” he said.

It is not easy for Yimam to reminisce about his journey.

“I walked in the desert for several days to reach Djibouti. Then a small boat took us to Yemen. There were many people on the boat. I saw so much suffering on the way… People dying of exhaustion and thirst in the desert. We walked with difficulty as our feet were sore. We were badly treated by the human traffickers.”

“If we complained about the conditions, they would beat us. When we reached Yemen, armed traffickers kidnapped us and asked us to pay. When I refused, they beat me. I was bleeding. My sister in Saudi Arabia paid a ransom and I was released.”

Yimam finally made it to Saudi Arabia and worked as a shepherd. After a few months, he got arrested and deported to Ethiopia.

Once back in his village, he had to rely on his parents to survive.

When the RYM Project started in Kalu in early 2017, he was selected to be part of a horticulture initiative. Together with 15 other young people, he is growing cabbage, onions and mung beans on a plot of land provided by the local administration.

Yimam and his peers received training in gardening and improved agricultural practices as well as vegetable seeds, agricultural tools and support to set up and run a nursery.

“I am happy to work in my own country. I am working to change my life,” he said.
Mohamed Seid

WHERE
Waraba Village, Amhara Region, Ethiopia

WHAT
Horticulture

© FAO/Tamiru Legesse
Mohamed lives with his wife and two children in Waraba village, in the Amhara Region, Ethiopia.

He used to rely on the little support his parents could give him. Unemployed and with limited access to land, his life changed when he became part of RYM, in December 2016.

Mohamed and 16 other young people formed the Edget Horticulture Producers Youth Enterprise. The RYM Project provided training in gardening and improved agricultural practices as well as vegetable seeds, tools, and a water pump for irrigation. It also facilitated the provision of land for the young people to grow a range of vegetables – from cabbage to mung bean.

“We chose to grow vegetables as we harvest 2-3 times a year now that we can use the water thanks to the irrigation system,” he said.

The group plans to sell their vegetables on the local market and in the long-run to provide their products to other markets as well.

“We want to grow our business and be a model for other young people in our area,” added Mohamed.
Amiat Ahmed

WHAT
Poultry farming

WHERE
South Wollo Zone, Amhara Region, Ethiopia

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Amiat Ahmed, 27 years old and a single mother of a two-year-old boy, lives with her parent in the South Wollo Zone of Amhara Region. Following many other young people from her region, she decided to migrate to the Middle East.

“I witnessed young people from my village sending money to their families, who managed to transform their houses from thatch-roofed to corrugated iron,” Amiat said. “I thought I could do the same thing for my parents.”

Her journey, to what was meant to be a better life, was not an easy one. Amiat walked for days in the desert, hungry and thirsty, mistreated by traffickers. When she finally managed to reach Saudi Arabia, she started working for a local family as a domestic helper, doing household chores.

“At first, I expected a warm welcome, but nothing was as expected,” she said.

Making a lot of sacrifices, Amiat partly fulfilled her dream of supporting her parents. She was able to buy oxen for her father and support her younger brother to go to university. However, after 5 years, Amiat was forced to leave Saudi Arabia because of her status of irregular immigrant. She returned to Ethiopia leaving all her belongings behind.

“My plan was to work for three more years to save money from my family, to buy land and construct a house, but I was forced to return” she said.

Back in South Wollo, she didn’t have any means of income. With the help of the local administration, she got involved in a poultry farming cooperative started with the support of the RYM Project.

The cooperative looks after pullets for profit-making business. The members buy day-old chickens, keep them for 45 days and sell them to local communities. As the profit grows, members share dividend among themselves. Today, Amiat is a member of this cooperative and gives her contribution to day-to-day activities. As part of the RYM Project, she has learned the importance of safe, orderly and regular migration.

“I see my future in our poultry farming business. I have a cute son, I don’t want to leave him,” she said. “But huge life challenges can drive people to migrate. If I should leave for migration again, I’ll do it the legal way. There are legal ways to migrate.”
Each year, rural areas lose a promising share of their workforce, as youth leave their homes and migrate to cities or move abroad in search of a better future. The distress induced by poverty, food insecurity and a lack of employment opportunities push many youth around the world to search for jobs elsewhere.

By addressing the links between distress migration and rural development, FAO is making a difference in Tunisia and Ethiopia. With funding from the Italian Development Cooperation, the Rural Youth Mobility Project (RYM) was launched in 2015 to provide unemployed youth in migration-prone areas the two countries with the necessary training and equipment to start their rural enterprises. The aim is to promote innovative pathways for youth employment and entrepreneurship in rural areas.