Promote Agriculture among Young People in Asia

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The global population is projected to rise from its present level of 6.9 billion to 9.2 billion by 2050. An estimated 1 billion people already are going hungry, and young rural people are increasingly disillusioned about working in the agricultural sector, which in many countries is stagnant and unproductive. Today’s generation of young people is the largest in history. In developing countries, young people (defined by the United Nations as those aged 15 to 24) make up 20 per cent of the population on average. They represent a huge potential resource to their countries. Yet ironically, rural areas are not benefiting fully from this resource. In fact, many rural communities are ageing precisely because, in the absence of incentives to remain, young women and men are leaving rural areas to seek opportunities elsewhere.

Figure 1. Rural young people’s share of population

Sixty percent (60%) of the world’s rural population is made up of young men and women. The rural youth is often unemployed or work informally in unpaid, low skilled, insecure and hazardous jobs, leading to massive migration to cities. In previous regional consultations, members of the Asian Farmers Association for Sustainable Rural Development (AFA) have shared the ageing of farmers in their countries, especially in North Asia and Southeast Asia, where the young no longer want to go into farming due to various reasons.
Rural Youth in Asia
UN ESCAP (2012) data shows that over 60% of the world’s youth, or more than 750 million young women and men aged 15-24 years, live in Asia-Pacific (Figure 2). In 2012, there were 4.3 billion people living in the region, which is equal to 60% of the global total of 7.1 billion people. The number of young people and their percentage of the total population have been increasing for over 60 years, but the forecast was for these to have peaked in 2010, and to decline in coming years. In 2010, India had 234 million young people, the highest number of any country in the world (representing 19% of India’s total population), followed by China with 225 million (representing 17% of total population). Bangladesh and the Philippines also had very high shares of youth at 20%; Japan had 12 million young people or 10% of total population.

Figure 2. Distribution of youth by sub region, Asia-Pacific, 2010

Attract the youth to agriculture
The youth can be attracted to agriculture if they see meaning, income opportunities as well as feel a sense of pride in farming. The youth needs training, as well as the presence of mentors, coaches, motivators. The youth needs to be provided with basic resources especially land, capital and equipment to make farming less tedious work. Several recommendations are identified to attract the youth to agriculture in Asia:

Access to land, capital and other basic resources
The youth needs to be provided with basic resources especially land, capital, seeds and equipment to make farming less tedious work and primarily be viable and sustainable.

Capacity building
The youth needs appropriate training and exposure through education, as well as the presence of mentors, coaches, motivators, to motivate young farmers. The youth needs to be attracted to sustainable, organic, agro-ecological approaches, farmer-owned and led enterprises and value
addition. An entrepreneurial attitude should be built among young farmers. They also need to be trained on constructive engagement and be provided with youth education, scholarship programs and ensure admission of especially women in agricultural universities. Methods like “learning by doing” or “farmers train farmers” should also be used.

Policy advocacy especially focused on youth
These include developing and advocating for policy proposals and programs to attract youth back to agriculture, e.g. Magna Carta of Young Farmers, soft loan for young farmers, ASEAN agricultural bank, right to seeds, campaign on land, New generations of Herder Volunteers, Financial support to young farmers, New Farmers Program, Setting up young farmers or young farmers start up programs, family management agreement, next generation or succession planning program, etc.

Research and Documentation
New knowledge has been gained from the research on situation of young farmers, and the existing initiatives and proposals from young farmers and their organizations to make agriculture a more viable option for rural youth. Further research needs to be done on effective strategies to attract youth to agriculture, e.g. comparative study of the use of organic and non-organic fertilizer, policy research on incentives for young farmers, research on impacts of climate change. The lack of a common definition or official data on young farmers should also be addressed. Action research such as participatory breeding of local seeds should also be documented, as well as success stories of young farmers as role models.

Regional Exchange program
These include young farmers’ gatherings, exchange visits among young farmers organizations, cooperation and international solidarity among young farmers, participation in trade fairs, exhibition, competition on farming techniques, sharing success stories of youth involvement in agriculture, etc.

Organization development
The key to enticing the youth into farming is forming a strong base of organized young farmers who are empowered to negotiate for support that they would need to nurture a happy and healthy world. The youth needs their own spaces to find their voice and actualize themselves as young farmers. They need more venues for more participation and representation at all levels, including establishing a youth arm at AFA, to give voice to young farmers, strengthen cooperation groups / cooperatives, to organize support to advocacy work, and to develop knowledge networks. The creation of cooperatives of young farmers or creation of youth sections in existing cooperatives and producer groups, workers’ associations, savings groups and women’s groups, should be supported. Moreover, organizing and strengthening small-scale family farmers will make them better prepared to access opportunities and benefit fully from ASEAN or other free trade integration and address adverse consequences as a result of integration.

Partnership with various actors
To attract youth into agriculture, there is a need to link up with various actors (government, business sector, banks, academe) – e.g., set up links with training centers and refresher courses; link up with consumer groups on about food safety and organic foods; create support from the local community for food purchase schemes. The public at large must be sensitized to the importance of the role of agriculture in the economy and in ensuring food security. Respect for farming should be built and more awareness should be created in recognizing the role of farmers and agriculture, and in ensuring the next generation of farmers through the succession of young farmers.
Eco-friendly village (EFV), a new model for Asian youth participation in sustainable agriculture designed by YPARD Iran

Eco friendly villages are targeted communities, with the aim that they become more sustainable economic, social and ecological communities. These villages are selected from communities that their population is usually between 50 to 150. If the number of population is more than 200 people, some parts of the villages are chosen as networks with a subset to create an ecosystem model. Today, changes and trends in climate, drought and water shortages, the disintegration of traditional forms of life, unnecessary consumption, and destruction of natural habitats, urban sprawl and reliance on fossil fuels is very evident, as a result, we must think of a way to prevent environmental disaster and an alternative to this model of life. These types of villages (i.e. the ecofriendly villages) support a sustainable environment, local economy and local culture around the world.

A general feature of these villages includes:
- Human scale (proportion between space dimensions, human dimensions, closeness space and attention of space details and those activities).
- Harmless human activities (provide recent society needs without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their needs provide).
- Sustainability at personal, social and economic life of the village (optimal operation of capacities and potentials, balance between populations, activates types and land).
- Consider of virtual water at production (agriculture and non-agriculture) especially at arid and semi-arid region.
- Development of climate-smart agriculture (CSA) with emphasis on three objectives: (1) sustainably increasing agricultural Productivity, to support equitable increases in farm incomes, food security and development; (2) adapting and building resilience of agricultural and food security systems to climate change; and (3) reducing greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture.
- Empowering of youth and rural woman with environmental friendly activities, modern agriculture and used them at participatory management.

Here we investigate the ecofriendly villages from different viewpoints and directions:

Social, cultural and spiritual viewpoints:
- Focus on a set of moral and spiritual values and principles that control the behavior of people closing to nature.
- Develop individuals' talents, creativity and maximum use of local labor force through empowering them.
- Optimizing better utilization of natural and human potentials of rural areas, so that they prevent the occurrence of problems such as environmental and biological systems degradation, and low quality of people's or residents' life in the future.
- Share common things and emphasize resources and mutual aids.
- These villages emphasize holistic health and preventive medical practices based on alternative medicine with an emphasis on traditional medicine and the use of herbal medicines.
- Provide jobs and materials for livelihood to all members of these villages throughout the year.
- Integration of marginalized social groups (such as women, children, the elderly, the weak and the disabled), in social and economic activities of the village.
- Develop human capabilities in relation to the environment (in the field of ecology of village such as developing organic schools)
- Emphasize the role of research and education for researchers and students from different fields of study and other villages’ residents.
- Emphasize diversity and cultural development of rural communities.
- Emphasize biodiversity of species in the ecosystem to human exploitation.
- Resist to globalization and cultural integration (maintaining cultural diversity)

**From ecological viewpoint:**
- EFV can cultivate crops and organic and healthy livestock, poultry (by the observance of standards of good agricultural practices or GAP) and natural with an emphasis on endemic plants and spices.
- Agricultural development in accordance with the principles of agro ecology (the science of applying ecological concepts and principles to in design, development and management of sustainable agricultural systems) or permacultures (with the three principles of land protection, protection of human and fair distribution)
- Emphasize the use of ecofriendly materials with domestic architecture in the construction of buildings and other structures.
- Conserve biodiversity in the region in relation to human exploitation.
- Promote the principles of environmental business (ecological). With an emphasis on those activities which are compatible with the ecosystem of the region.
- Ecofriendly villages can help to take into account the life cycle of all products used in the eco-village from the standpoint of social, spiritual, as well as environmental point of view (Use of goods whose wastes are quickly absorbed by the nature or have a relatively very short life cycle).

**Technology viewpoint:**
- Combination of knowledge and ecofriendly, modern technology such as Nano technology (development of technology should be Compatible with recent and future society's needs).
- Use of modern methods of ecofriendly agriculture according to land use planning, so that keep the balance and proportion between population, activity and land. (logical, rational utilization of environmental talent with different methods and techniques such as conservation agriculture)
- Use of renewable energy
- Least use of fossil fuels (transportation, heating and cooling systems)

(References will be made available upon request)