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Improving Youth Organizations in Asia: Lessons from Three Asian Case Studies



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Rural youth organizations in Asia

Rural youth development in countries like Thailand, the Philippines and Japan are carried out through mobilization of young farmers' organizations. These organizations voluntarily work together to address the outstanding social and economic problems in their respective communities. This brochure reports in brief the findings from three case studies relating to "best practices" for education and training of rural youth as practiced by three youth organizations in Japan, Philippines and Thailand.

The **Thanat Samakhee Club** of Thailand was established in May 1973 to promote cooperation among youth of the Thanat sub-district, and provide them opportunities to gain knowledge and skills on agriculture and home economics. The Club's individual and group members participated in various projects which included the production of fruit trees, perennial plants and vegetables.

The Club also sponsors training activities and regular meetings for networking and information sharing among farm youth throughout Thailand. This has enhanced members' pride and capacity to pursue agricultural careers to generate income for themselves and their families.

Another successful youth group is the **Tuga 4-H Club** based in Kalinga of the Cordillera Administrative Region of the Philippines. It was started in November 1996. Its members are mostly out-of-school youths and the rest are either high school or college students. Among the livelihood projects ventured by its members are production of ducks, goats, poultry and swine, vegetable and ornamental gardening, rice farming, and candy processing.

Japan incorporates agriculture education in the curricula of secondary schools, junior colleges and universities. It also administers training programs in farmers' colleges and short-term programs organized by the district agriculture extension workers. Some of its farm youth training programs are administered by the **Rural Youth Education Development Association (RYEDA)**.

Education and training approaches followed

The factors contributing to the "success" of the Clubs in training rural youth are summarized as follows:

- The training subjects are selected based on the needs of the members and that of the community through participatory decision-making;
- The training is conducted by a "learning by doing" method. Sharing of knowledge and skills among the participants provide the basis for mutual learning;
- The Club members are able to receive on-the-job training through the community's income generating activities, which benefit the Club members and the community as a whole.



Members of the Thanat Samakhee Club pose with FAO-RAP Senior Extension, Education and Communication Officer S. Malcolm Hazelman (1st row, 2nd from right).

Lessons Learnt from the experiences of the rural youth organizations

From the experiences and practices of Thailand, the Philippines and Japan, as far as education and training of rural youth is concerned, the following lessons can be drawn:

i. Sustaining opportunities for rural youth is important

Provision of avenues for learning and opportunities for rural youth must, as much as possible, be sustained. This may include recruitment of capable leaders and generation of funds through selling of handicrafts, and other products. Commitment of adult advisers to guide the officers and members of the organization is also critical. Sports and social activities like agricultural skills competition and inter-organizational dialogues will enhance closer relationships and bonding among members of the organization.

ii. Education and training programs must reflect the needs and realities of the rural communities and farm youth.

Training programs that reflect the needs and realities of the farm youth and the community in general will help convince local government officials in the community to support the program, especially in providing manpower for training and education of the youth. Support of local government units is especially necessary on the part of the Philippine rural youth because implementation of their programs, particularly those in the rural sector, is now the responsibility of the local units.

iii. Coordination and strengthening of linkages is a priority

Coordination and linkages with other agencies and schools and the mobilization of youth volunteer leaders, the capacity-building of local government units, the national and local government representatives and other youth support groups that collaborate with the youth organization in undertaking its various activities must also be ensured. This coordination would mean the institutionalization of a system that would result to better partnerships and successful implementation of programs.

iv. Capacity building and mobilization of members of the organization is an important component

Capacity building and mobilization of members is to empower and ensure that members are capable of carrying out the responsibilities that are delegated to them by their leaders. Proper delegation of duties and responsibilities would not only free the youth



Rural youth boys rehabilitating a fish pond.



The Tuga 4-H Club venture in vegetable gardening as one of its income generating projects.

organization leader from carrying out all the burdens alone. It would also promote a sense of ownership and responsibility among all members.

v. Use of effective education and training approaches is needed

The best practices of the cited countries also underscore the importance of using effective training approaches for rural youth. Generating support from the community and other organizations for the implementation of such will not be as difficult if the national and local governments and the community understand and become convinced of the organization's aims. After all, youth organizations tend to be the first ones tapped by the national government and the NGOs for the implementation of their programs and services because they are the ones easily mobilized. Young and energetic as they are, the youth tend to be more active and aggressive compared to other age groups.

As per Japan's experience, internship training programs play an important role as far as agriculture training is concerned for the past 50 years. This has been considered the most effective and practical method for training future farmers and agriculture technicians. This

has also been a big help to rural youth who had not gained formal education from more advanced farms and institutions.

Moreover, school administrators must recognize the limitations of formal education in giving the practical and more actual "hands-on" type of training to students by revising their existing and more conventional curricula to accommodate and incorporate internship training programs as part of their intra curricular activities. Existing internship programs must be further improved by orienting trainees on the nature and kind of problems they will likely meet once they are in the field.

Finally, the analysis of "best practices" of successful youth organizations underscores the importance of the youth organizations' initiatives in using effective training approaches that would fit to the needs of their members. With the support and cooperation of other organizations, the national and local government units, and the community in general, and with their recognition and commitment to help provide education and training opportunities to rural youth, youth development would be sustained and enhanced across countries. 🌐