

FAO promoting decent employment opportunities for rural youth

News from the web



"Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger" is the first Millennium Development Goal (MDG), and includes the target 1B: "Achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all, including women and young people". Through its new Strategic Framework, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) is committed to ensuring that decent rural employment creation is integrated into agricultural and rural development policies, strategies, programmes and partnerships.

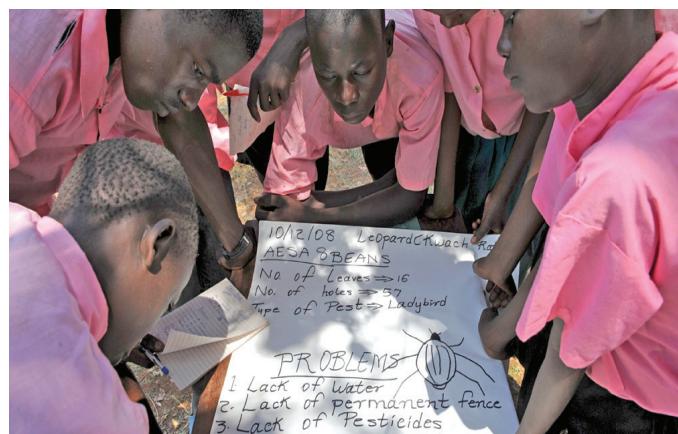
"Without decent work, young people are left particularly susceptible to poverty, which, in turn, complicates access to education and basic health services, further impeding employability [...] The ability of youth to find full and productive employment must be a central objective of national development strategies, including poverty reduction policies."

Kofi Annan, 2006, Former Secretary-General of the United Nations

Rural youth: Challenge and opportunity

Approximately **1.2 billion youths¹** live in the world today, comprising over 14 percent of the global population.² Almost 88 percent of these young people live in developing countries – a figure that is expected to increase over the coming decades. Asia alone is home to 60 percent of the world's youth, while a further 18 percent live in Africa. Within Africa, 61 percent of the entire population are under 24 years of age, representing current and future youth cohorts of a sobering magnitude.

The majority of the world's youth live and work in rural areas. Lacking access to productive resources, many rural youths rely on their own labour to earn a living. However, rural labour markets in most developing countries do not provide sufficient decent work opportunities³ for young women and men, compromising their ability to lead productive lives. Decent work deficits that rural youth face include: weak enforcement of labour legislation; insecure and low incomes; poor health, safety and environmental conditions; gender inequality in pay and opportunities; the exploitation of migrant workers; inadequate social protection; and weak social dialogue. These decent work deficits are reflected in the disproportionately high levels of unemployment, underemployment and poverty among young people. In 2012, the global youth unemployment rate was 12.4 percent, almost three times higher than the corresponding rate for adults.⁴ Furthermore, young people account for 23.5 percent of the world's working poor.⁵ In Africa, over 70 percent



of youths subsist on less than USD2 per day,⁶ and the incidence of decent work deficits and poverty are particularly high among young rural women.

These poor prospects for young people stem in part from the rural economic stagnation observed in many developing countries. To remedy this, FAO helps to promote activities that bring greater economic diversity and dynamism to rural areas, and thereby provide employment and income-generating opportunities for young rural people across the socio-economic ladder. Tapping into the economic potential of the youth cohort represents a tremendous opportunity to help drive this rural transformation, and reduce rural poverty among youths and adults alike.



Youth employment, poverty reduction and food security – Where is the link?



For youth living in rural areas, the prospects of finding decent work are often limited. With little or no access to land, markets, finance and education, rural youth struggle to engage in profitable agricultural activities. The resulting unemployment, decent work deficits and working poverty among youth present a serious threat to their livelihood and food security.

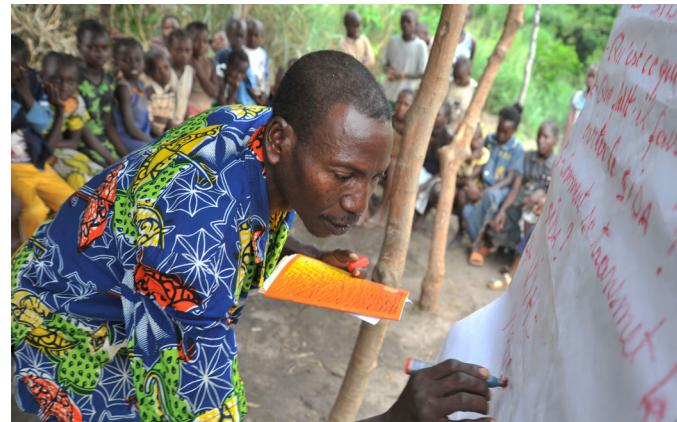
Furthermore, farm populations are ageing in many developing countries as rural youth migrate to urban areas in search of work. Without increased involvement of youth in agriculture, long-term shortages in skilled agricultural labour will inevitably occur. Failure to reverse this trend is likely to negatively affect agricultural productivity, output and food supply, which in turn may undermine household and national food security.

Promoting and incentivizing youth participation in the agricultural sector will provide much-needed employment opportunities for rural youth, and help fortify food security at the household and national levels. Because labour is often the only asset that rural youth possess, their participation in the labour market is one of the principal determinants of their well-being. If employment opportunities are limited and of poor quality, youth will continue to struggle. By contrast, decent work empowers youth, and allows them to make the necessary investments – in skill acquisition, and their health and education – to break the vicious cycle of rural poverty.

However, many governments lack the knowledge and capacities needed to effectively generate decent employment opportunities for rural youth. National policy frameworks need to better account for the creation of both *sufficient* and *decent* employment opportunities in rural areas. Governments' organizational and administrative capacities must be strengthened to ensure effective implementation of youth employment activities. Youth themselves must be better equipped to make a meaningful contribution to agricultural and rural development. FAO can play a central role in supporting governments to empower rural youth.

FAO's support to rural youth

Achieving food security for all is at the heart of FAO's mandate. Given the prevalence of poverty and food insecurity among rural youth, they have long been a target of FAO's activities. More recently, the Organization has strengthened its commitment to rural youth in its new Strategic Framework. This framework focuses FAO's efforts and resources on achieving five strategic objectives. Underlying the third strategic objective – reducing rural poverty – is an explicit emphasis on the promotion of



decent employment opportunities for rural youth. This reflects the importance that FAO assigns to youth development as a catalyst for reducing poverty and improving food security. It also signals FAO's intent to address youth employment in a comprehensive way, redirecting expertise and efforts throughout the Organization.

To promote employment opportunities for rural youth, FAO has focused its activities and resources around the implementation of a complementary set of activities. Through awareness-raising, policy assistance, capacity development and technical support activities, FAO seeks to develop a strong enabling environment in which young people can thrive, while simultaneously empowering youth to seize current and future opportunities. This unified approach draws on resources throughout the Organization, coordinating activities across FAO technical units and decentralized offices under a corporate Rural Youth Employment (RYE) Initiative. In this way, the Organization's human and financial resources are mobilized and utilized to produce concrete and measurable results at the country level.

Changing the discourse

Consideration of youth and their employment needs is often lacking in the discourse on development. In response to this awareness deficit, FAO actively consults donors and governments on the importance of creating decent employment opportunities for rural youth. To do so, the Organization has developed a series of knowledge products highlighting the role of decent rural employment as a core pillar of sustainable poverty reduction. FAO also develops guidance materials and tool kits highlighting best practices and lessons learned in promoting decent work for rural youth. Furthermore, FAO strives to develop more country-specific research to advise stakeholders about employment conditions and opportunities in their respective countries. This can include analyses of a given country's labour market conditions, youth employment situation, and untapped opportunities for rural employment generation.



Supporting governments

To ensure that increased awareness translates into tangible results on the ground, FAO supports governments in developing a policy environment that is more conducive to the needs of rural youth. To do so, FAO first assists governments in formulating and implementing policies, strategies, programmes and projects to effectively support rural youth. This **policy assistance** includes mappings and analyses of existing policies, the identification of policy gaps, and the formulation of policy recommendations, among other activities. Particular attention is given to promoting coherence among relevant policies, as these complementarities are crucial to achieving sustainable poverty reduction.

In support of its policy assistance activities, FAO also helps develop governments' capacities to implement and monitor relevant policies, strategies and programmes. These **capacity development** activities help ensure that policies designed to enhance youth employment opportunities do in fact achieve the desired outcomes. Specific capacity development activities are designed in collaboration with national stakeholders, and can range from improving a government's ability to apply and enforce International Labour Standards in rural areas, to supporting line ministries' staff in integrating decent employment aspects in the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of agricultural strategies and programmes.



Empowering youth

To complement its support to government institutions, FAO also provides targeted technical support to youths themselves. In so doing, FAO illustrates what can be accomplished on the ground to encourage governments to scale up and take ownership of piloted youth employment initiatives (see Box 1). Prominent among these activities is FAO's implementation of the **Junior Farmer Field and Life Schools (JFFLS)** methodology. JFFLS supports rural youth in acquiring agricultural, business and life skills, while simultaneously promoting business development, access to markets and group cooperation (see Box 2). The capacities of local civil society organizations – cooperatives, producers' organizations, youth groups and youth farmers' associations – are also strengthened to help promote rural development that is more inclusive of youth.

Box 1: Sustainable livelihoods for young people in Zambia

As part of an ILO-led UN Joint Programme, FAO is working with the Zambian Government to promote decent employment opportunities for rural youth in the soybean value chain. This programme represents a major commitment to youth development by the Zambian Government, and builds on lessons learned from FAO's pilot projects on youth employment. The programme supports NEPAD's Rural Futures Initiative (RFI), and is part of the government efforts to fulfill its commitments under the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP).

Partnerships to promote decent employment for rural youth

Effective partnerships are central to FAO's strategy on youth development. FAO engages with public sector, private sector and civil society partners at all levels to ensure a unified and coherent approach to creating decent employment opportunities for rural youth.

UN level

To enhance the coherence of the UN system's approach to youth development, the UN Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development has formulated a System-wide Action Plan on Youth (Youth-SWAP). FAO is actively involved in the Youth-SWAP, ensuring that sufficient attention and resources are devoted to addressing the employment needs of rural youth. In particular, FAO is taking the lead on monitoring countries' implementation of mechanisms that improve access to services, land, markets and information for young people living in rural areas.

FAO-ILO

A partnership between FAO and ILO to promote decent work is institutionalized through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed in 2004. While ILO leads the Global Employment and Decent Work Agenda, FAO has a crucial complementary role to play in promoting decent **rural** employment. In particular, FAO has a comparative advantage in promoting decent work with respect to informal agricultural employment, agricultural processing and rural marketing enterprises.

Regional level

In Africa, FAO has partnered with several regional stakeholders to promote employment opportunities for rural youth. FAO is supporting youth inclusiveness in the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP), which serves as a policy framework for many of Africa's agriculture-based economies. FAO is a key partner in the Rural Futures Initiative (RFI) – a



"A multi-pronged approach to employment promotion – including a favourable macro-economic environment, skills and labour market policies that facilitate the school-to-work transition, rights at work, youth entrepreneurship and social protection of young workers – is essential. Shaping effective policies for decent work for young people – at home and in the context of migration – requires the engagement of governments, employers' organizations and trade unions in social dialogue."

Guy Ryder, 2013, Director-General of ILO

programme of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) that seeks to build a common vision for rural economic development under CAADP. FAO is also assisting the African Union's youth development efforts by supporting components of the African Youth Charter (AYC) related to the promotion of decent employment. In the *Caribbean sub-region*, FAO is partnering with numerous governments and other stakeholders to develop a sub-regional strategy on rural youth employment.

National Level

Partnerships with governments and other national stakeholders are vital to FAO's efforts to create an enabling environment that is more conducive to the needs of rural youth. In particular, FAO has developed an Integrated Country Approach (ICA) on the promotion of decent rural employment, through which it partners with relevant national stakeholders. The ICA is currently being implemented in partnership with the national governments of Malawi and the United Republic of Tanzania, and will be replicated in other countries under FAO's new Strategic Framework.

Box 2: Junior Farmer Field and Life Schools (JFFLS) in practice

FAO has implemented the JFFLS methodology in over 20 countries as part of its unified approach to youth development, consistently achieving positive results on the ground. To date, these trainings have reached more than 25 000 young women and men. In Mozambique, the government decided to build on the success of JFFLS pilot projects by incorporating the tenets of this methodology into its national school curricula.

Community Level

While working to create a strong enabling environment at the national level, FAO also partners with stakeholders at the community level. Although the creation of a strong enabling environment is undoubtedly important, vulnerable rural youth and their representative organizations must simultaneously be empowered so that they are adequately equipped to seize available opportunities. Stakeholders in targeted communities play an active role in helping FAO assess appropriate policy assistance and capacity development activities, and are key partners in technical field activities, including JFFLS training.

Conclusion

Rural youth represent both a challenge to, and an opportunity for reducing rural poverty. To overcome this challenge and seize this opportunity, FAO supports government efforts to generate the decent employment opportunities necessary for young people to earn a decent livelihood. FAO's support consists of a complementary set of awareness-raising, policy assistance, capacity development and technical support activities designed to help governments develop an enabling environment that meets the multidimensional needs of rural youth. Indeed, sustainable poverty reduction and rural economic development will only be achieved when national enabling environments allow and empower young people to achieve their full potential. FAO is committed to making this a reality.

Endnotes

1. The United Nations defines youth as all people between the ages of 15 and 24.
2. UNDESA. 2013. *UNDESA World population prospects, the 2012 revision: Key findings and advance tables*. New York, UNDESA.
3. Decent work comprises the four strategic goals of employment promotion, social protection, the enforcement of standards and rights at work, and the existence of a strong social dialogue in the workplace.
4. ILO. 2013. *ILO Global employment trends for youth 2013*. Geneva, ILO.
5. ILO. 2012. *ILO Global employment trends 2012*. Geneva, ILO.
6. OECD. 2012. *African economic outlook 2012*. Paris, OECD.

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Visit the FAO-ILO Youth Employment webpage: www.fao-il.org/fao-il-youth

