

# SARD and... children and youth



The future of agriculture and rural areas in developing countries depends on today's rural children and youth. It is essential that these young generations are given the necessary attention and opportunities to develop and contribute to the well-being, economy and improvement of their communities and nations. Young people are vital and valuable partners in the development process, and their opinions and needs must be mainstreamed into agricultural development policy, nationally and internationally.



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## Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development (SARD)

Agriculture and rural development are sustainable when they are ecologically sound, economically viable, socially just, culturally appropriate, humane and based on a scientific approach.

Rural development policy must aim to meet the nutritional and other human needs of present and future generations; and maintain, and where possible, enhance the productive and regenerative capacity of the natural resource base. It must also provide for the durable employment of those generations, reduce their vulnerability and strengthen their self-reliance.

## Did you know?

- In the developing world, children and young people under 25 years of age constitute more than half the total population.<sup>7</sup> Youth, who are between 15 and 24 years old, make up 18% of the global population.<sup>6</sup>
- More than half of global youth live in rural areas of developing countries.<sup>1</sup> In sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, up to 70 percent of youth live in rural areas and half the youth population entering the labour force work in agriculture.<sup>1</sup>
- In 2004, nearly half the world's youth were living, probably as dependants, on less than US\$2 a day;<sup>6,7</sup> 20 percent were living in absolute poverty on less than US\$1 a day.<sup>7</sup>
- Each year, 11 million children under the age of five die, largely from preventable diseases.<sup>7</sup> Most of these children are in rural areas, where poverty rates are considerably higher than they are in urban areas.<sup>6,7</sup>
- Children are at greater risk than adults to accidents, illness and disability when exposed to the dangerous tools, chemicals and severe temperatures that characterize agriculture.
- Between 130 and 140 million youth are illiterate.<sup>7</sup>
- The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that 93 percent of the jobs available to young people in developing countries are in the informal economy, where earnings are low, working conditions are unsafe and there is little or no access to social protection.<sup>6</sup>

## Why is action needed?

- Although the future belongs to today's young people, they do not receive adequate attention in national and international development policies,<sup>1,3</sup> particularly those concerning rural areas and agriculture. For example, the rural and agricultural chapters of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers rarely deal with issues of youth,<sup>1</sup> particularly poverty,<sup>1,6</sup> and their suggestions for youth employment tend to focus on urban youth.<sup>1</sup> The views and needs of children and youth must be mainstreamed<sup>1,2,4</sup> and their involvement increased in the design and implementation of agricultural and rural development policies and programmes.
- Across the world, significant numbers of young people are leaving their rural communities. Rural areas are therefore losing the young productive workforce<sup>3,4</sup> that is essential for their sustainable development. There is an urgent need to provide appropriate education, training, and job opportunities that give rural young people<sup>2</sup> the choice of staying, working and prospering in rural areas and developing livelihoods based in both rural and urban areas.<sup>1,2</sup>
- Fewer rural than urban children, particularly girls, are able to attend or complete their basic schooling.<sup>6</sup> When rural children do attend school, curricula are rarely relevant to the context and needs of rural areas, and instead often belittle farming, and encourage urban lifestyles and professions.<sup>1,4</sup> Formal education in rural areas must be directed to equip children with the skills and knowledge necessary for rural livelihoods and agriculture.<sup>1,4,7</sup>
- Policy-makers, development practitioners and society at large often have prejudices against young people, viewing them as problematic and untrustworthy.<sup>4,6,7</sup> Young people's

multiple qualities – their creativity, energy, adaptability, capacity and disposition to learn<sup>2,3,4</sup> – should be recognized. Young people are powerful agents of change and sources of ideas and solutions for sustainable development.<sup>2,3,4,6</sup>

## What are the policy goals?

- Mainstream children and youth as priority groups that require special focus and targeted development policies and programmes.
- Ensure all major development policies programmes and investments are planned in consultation with young people, taking full account of their views and needs and of possible impacts on them.
- Involve youth men and women in rural and agricultural policy- and decision-making at the community, national and international levels.
- Provide rural children and youth with appropriate educational, informal training and volunteering programmes that value agriculture and rural life and equip young people for mixed rural and urban livelihoods.
- Facilitate the entry of youth into formal jobs by providing apprenticeships and training programmes, and including young people who lack formal education.
- Provide rural youth, particularly women, with access to land and the financial services that are available to adults.

## The policy issues

### Unheard voices of youth

Even though young people work and contribute to households and communities,<sup>2,3</sup> their opinions and needs are often ignored.<sup>1,4</sup> Adults, particularly men, have greater access to essential agricultural and financial services,<sup>3</sup> tend to control resources<sup>4</sup> and dominate decision-making<sup>1</sup> in households, cooperatives and the wider community.<sup>4</sup> As young men grow older, their roles in and access to social and economic resources increase, while those of young women usually decrease.<sup>1</sup> Most

### Young people: definitions and statistics

The developing world's total children and youth population under 25 years of age numbered 2.7 billion in 2005. Of these, just over a billion are considered "youth" according to the official United Nations definition, which includes people between 15 and 24 years of age.<sup>7</sup> There are 1.3 billion young people of school age, between five and 18 years of age, and slightly more than 0.5 billion children less than five years old.<sup>8</sup>

agricultural development and poverty alleviation efforts have focused on male heads of household; adult women are increasingly being included, but young people, particularly girls, continue to be side-lined.<sup>4</sup>

### Unequal and limited work opportunities

Youth account for a quarter of the world's working-age population,<sup>6</sup> but have higher unemployment rates than adults in most countries,<sup>3</sup> often because of limited educational and professional experience and discrimination.<sup>6,7</sup> An estimated 88 to 96 million youth are unemployed,<sup>6,7</sup> representing half the total number of unemployed people in the world.<sup>6</sup> Youth do not have adequate access to jobs in the formal economy, and their livelihood strategies in the informal economy are often temporary, short-term, demanding and hazardous<sup>4,6</sup>. In rural areas of developing countries, youth are involved in a range of agricultural and off-farm activities.<sup>1</sup> The main problem they face is underemployment, as these activities often have low returns<sup>1</sup> and there are not enough opportunities for educated youth to employ their skills locally in rural areas.<sup>4</sup>

### Rural-urban livelihoods and migration

Rural youth are increasingly developing rural-urban livelihood strategies, which involve commuting and temporary or permanent emigration into urban areas<sup>1,2,3,4,6</sup> or foreign countries. Migration of youth and adults has both positive and negative aspects. A vast majority of rural migrants move into

crowded slums in cities,<sup>6</sup> while rural communities lose their vital human capital.<sup>3,4</sup> The loss of young, productive workers leads to the ageing of rural areas.<sup>2</sup> Migration often exposes young people to new opportunities,<sup>2</sup> however, often enabling them to send remittances back to their relatives in rural areas to improve living conditions there.<sup>1,6</sup> The decision to migrate depends on a range of internal and external factors, and it is important to highlight that migration is not always the preferred option for young people;<sup>2</sup> many would like to continue living and farming in their rural communities.<sup>4</sup> It is therefore essential to increase investment in rural areas and agriculture so as to create more job opportunities for youth.

### The conditions facing rural girls and women

Young girls in rural areas face particularly bleak conditions. Poor families who cannot afford to send all their children to school often send only their male children.<sup>4</sup> As a result, girls are twice as likely as boys not to complete or attend school.<sup>3</sup> In addition, girls in rural areas frequently marry and start childbearing at a very young age.<sup>1,8</sup> Some 46 percent of rural women in developing countries who are currently 20 to 24 years of age were married as children, before they were 18 years old.<sup>8</sup> In 2004, 14 million births in developing countries (17 percent of the total) were to young mothers of 15 to 19 years of age.<sup>7</sup> HIV incidence is also higher among young women than young men<sup>7</sup> in part due to weaker negotiating power. In sub-Saharan Africa, 76 percent of the 6.2 million young people living with HIV are female.<sup>7</sup>

### HIV and AIDS and orphans

Of the estimated 5 million new HIV infections around the world each year, half are among young people.<sup>3,7</sup> Even so, outside a few high-prevalence countries, HIV incidence among rural young people still remains low.<sup>1</sup> Sub-Saharan Africa is the worst-affected region for HIV/AIDS, with an estimated 12 million children under 18 years of age having lost both parents to the disease.<sup>7,8</sup> HIV/AIDS forces children out of school and into work as they attempt to care for their ill parents and provide

income for the family. When they are orphaned, these children become heads of households, often living in the poorest conditions<sup>2</sup> and facing stigmatization and discrimination.

## What are the policy options?

### Increased access to basic education

Children in rural areas of developing countries, particularly from poor families, have to take on adult tasks and responsibilities and begin working at early ages.<sup>1,2,4</sup> As a result, a high proportion of rural children, particularly girls, do not finish or even start school.<sup>6</sup>

It is essential that all children have access to, and are able to complete, basic education, to become fully literate and numerate.<sup>1,4</sup> Several interventions can increase school enrolment in rural areas, particularly of poor children. Among effective methods are school feeding programmes, financial incentives to poor families, and adjusting the daily school schedule to allow children to perform other tasks.

### Appropriate education and skill training

As well as equipping children with skills that can be used for urban livelihoods, it is essential to ensure that both formal and non-formal<sup>9</sup> educational programmes and cultural services in rural areas value agricultural professions



and make rural livelihoods attractive to young people.<sup>1,2,4,6,7</sup> Agricultural fields can be used as additional classrooms,<sup>4,6</sup> for teaching about not only ecology, natural resource management and the environment, but also mathematics, data collection and analysis, and social and health topics.<sup>4</sup> Experiential, agricultural learning and vocational training are particularly effective in equipping rural young people with the skills and knowledge they need for agriculture and off-farm rural trades.<sup>4</sup> Integrating agricultural learning with, or running it alongside of, formal education are also effective ways of strengthening the links among young generations, households and rural and urban communities<sup>4,6,10</sup> and passing on knowledge, information and new

techniques, via children, to older generations.<sup>2,4</sup>

### Access to productive resources

For youth to be able to fend for themselves, there is need for more than education and training.<sup>1</sup> It is also essential to make resources such as land and financial services available and accessible to youth, particularly young women.<sup>1,2,3,4,5,7</sup> Formal financial institutions generally distrust youth, requiring collateral that most youth lack.<sup>2,6</sup> These practices must be changed, and provision of micro-credit, grants and loans should be extended to youth,<sup>1,2,6,7</sup> with flexibility to allow young people to choose how they use the funds for education, health, shelter, and/or investment in enterprises or productive activities.<sup>6</sup> Youth's lack of access to land is a crucial factor that limits their ability to develop agricultural livelihoods.<sup>5</sup> Inheritance is often the only way for youth to obtain access to land, but many young people, particularly girls, inherit very little or no land, becoming landless.<sup>1</sup> To address this situation, land reform that takes into account the situation and needs of youth may be necessary.<sup>5</sup> Land grants, loans or leases could be provided to youth associations<sup>3</sup> for cooperative farming. Partnerships can be created between farmers who own land but lack labour and rural youth who have no access to land.<sup>4</sup>

### Policies targeted to young people

The World Programme of Action for Youth outlines a number of proposals for action

## Innovative education for rural areas

- The successful Farmers Field School (FFS) approach, based on experiential learning in farmers fields and built around farmers' own knowledge and real-time observations, has been adapted for children and youth in the form of Junior Farmers Field and Life Schools (JFFS). In seven African countries these schools empower young people under 18 years of age who have been orphaned by AIDS and can no longer receive agricultural knowledge and skills from their parents. The children learn about soil, water and nutrient management, livestock production and agro-processing, as well as gender equality and HIV/AIDS prevention and mitigation.
- In rural environments where formal schooling is limited and a large proportion of the population is illiterate, the local radio can be a powerful tool for education, communication and development. Several projects have trained young people on information technology and the operation of radio stations, before encouraging them to research and produce the radio programmes themselves.<sup>4</sup> Young people select topics that interest them, interview local people and learn a series of valuable skills that range from computer literacy to public speaking.<sup>4</sup>

## Tools and resources

**UN Programme on Youth:**  
<http://www.un.org/youth/>

**Young Professionals' Platform for Agricultural Research for Development:**  
<http://www.yppard.org/>

**FAO Education for Rural People:**  
<http://www.fao.org/sd/erp/>

**FAO Junior Farmer Field and Life Schools (JFFLS):**  
[http://www.fao.org/bestpractices/content/11/11\\_04\\_en.htm](http://www.fao.org/bestpractices/content/11/11_04_en.htm)

**Global Farmer Field School Network and Resource Centre:**  
<http://www.farmerfieldschool.info/>

**ILO Youth Employment Network (YEN):**  
<http://www.ilo.org/yen/>

**International Movement for Catholic Agricultural and Rural Youth (IMCARY/MIJARC):** <http://www.mijarc.org/>

**Global Youth Action Network (GYAN):**  
<http://www.youthlink.org/gyanv5/index.htm>

**Global Youth Coalition on HIV/AIDS (GYCA):**  
<http://www.youthaidscoalition.org/>

of value to all governments interested in promoting rural youth. At national level, development of young people requires a cross-sectoral approach that involves different departments and ministries.<sup>6</sup> To help coordinate policies, a lead agency or focal points in different ministries should be established.<sup>6</sup> Young people are a heterogeneous group and policies targeted towards them must acknowledge their different needs according to gender, age (school-aged and post-school), and socio-economic background.<sup>1,2,6</sup>

## Youth organization and representation

The opinions and needs of youth need to be heard and included, throughout the policy-making process. To this effect, youth must receive support in forming or strengthening their representative organizations.<sup>1,6</sup> Governments and development agencies must recognize the vital contribution youth make, and encourage their participation in the identification of policy problems and the proposal of solutions. Partnerships with youth organizations must also be created

for the implementation of agricultural and rural development programmes.<sup>4</sup>

## Facilitate entry into the formal economy

Opportunities for youth to enter formal jobs must be broadened. This includes creating internships and apprenticeships with local entrepreneurs and businesses,<sup>6</sup> and providing post-school and job-related training courses<sup>1</sup> that allow the entry of older youth and of those who did not attend or complete formal schooling<sup>6</sup>. There must also be greater recognition and validation of the knowledge and skills gained through non-formal, vocational and experiential learning.<sup>6</sup>

## Capitalizing on educated rural youth

The rural economy of developing countries can expand through agricultural processing industries and trade in the resulting processed products in growing urban and regional markets. A common problem is that adults in rural areas lack the skills and education to manage such businesses.<sup>2</sup> There is a "golden opportunity" to link youth education and training programmes to rural productive enterprises so that young people's newly acquired skills can be applied locally and they are not forced to migrate to urban areas.<sup>2</sup> Increased investments from governments and development agencies in rural productive enterprises and industries, and in production, distribution and marketing groups and cooperatives are therefore needed.

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## References

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<sup>9</sup> UN General Assembly Economic and Social Council, 62<sup>nd</sup> session, 2006. *Report of the Secretary General on the follow-up to the World Programme of Action for Youth to the year 2000 and beyond "Goals and targets for monitoring the progress of youth in the global economy".* General Assembly Economic and Social Council, 2007 Report to the SG addendum

<sup>10</sup> UN *Supplement to the World Programme of Action for Youth to the year 2000 and Beyond, General Assembly Economic and Social Council, 2007.*

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