

SEARICE COMMENTS ON THE DRAFT ZERO OF CFS POLICY RECOMMENDATION ON PROMOTING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND EMPLOYMENT IN AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SYSTEMS

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One of SEARICE core beliefs is that the welfare of our future is at the hands of our smallholder farmers have been growing and providing our food, through their hard work and efforts. Unfortunately, statistics show that the number of people, especially the youth of today, who are entering the agricultural sector is dwindling which will have massive consequence on our international food security and the sustainability of agriculture as a practice.

There are various and valid reasons why the youth are not enticed to pursue agriculture. Within the context of the Philippines (which mirrors the situation in many developing countries), the average daily wage of farmers is PHP 331.10 (2019 study)¹ which is way below the daily minimum wage of around 500 pesos². On top of this, farmers also rarely receive help and assistance from local agencies and national government in terms of appropriate agricultural inputs (and if they do, they receive agrochemicals or hybrid seeds) or social benefits, despite this being their rights as enshrined in Republic Act 7606, commonly known as the Magna Carta for Small Farmers.³ Worst, there is an onslaught of human rights violations against small holder farmers, especially regarding issues on land dispute. According to the report of Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP) at Tanggol Magsasaka, national coalitions of farmer organizations and associations, around 262 farmers and peasant leaders have been killed in the Philippines since July 2016, and 190 of the killings happened from February to July 2020.

SEARICE, however, does not see this as a reason to stop working for agriculture, especially for the youth. We believe that we can reform the system, create appropriate and effective programs, lobby to government officials for progressive policies, and be part of international discussions and works such as this to improve the state of agriculture and food systems that will hopefully improve the general status of the sector. We hope that through this international policy, we can create a future where agriculture will have the same importance as other careers and a future where the youth will wholeheartedly pursue the sector.

In consideration of the proposed provisions of the zero draft, stated under are our specific comments:

PROVIDE AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND EMPLOYMENT IN AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SYSTEMS

1a. In terms of implementing existing global policy instruments that are relevant to the youth, we must give importance to the newly adopted (2018) UNDROP or the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas. It is an excellent draft that can help and further protect the rights of the youth, especially those coming from peasant communities and rural areas. And as we all know, most farmer youth are from peasant communities or rural areas. The declaration pays particular

¹ <https://psa.gov.ph/content/farm-workers-are-paid-average-daily-wage-php-33110-2019-calabarzon-farm-workers-are-highest>

² <https://tradingeconomics.com/philippines/minimum-wages>

³ <https://www.chanrobles.com/republicacts/republicactno7606.html>

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attention to the rights and needs of children and youth in rural areas against multiple forms of discrimination they face day to day. It also stipulates their right to protection from any work that is likely hazardous or would interfere with their education or be forced to work in general, as youth from rural areas are often forced out of schools and into labor. The declaration also mandates ratifying countries to ramp up their effort to combat malnutrition amongst rural children, especially within the framework of primary health. The state should give them access to adequate nutritious food, adequate nutrition during pregnancy for women, and nutritional education. Lastly, it reiterates and reaffirms the innate right of children to have access to education in accordance and with respect to their culture. SEARICE believes that the UNDROP is the most accurate international commitment that can address and promote the rights of youth in relation to agriculture and food systems since the declaration always contextualizes these rights over the youth's respective cultural norms and practices. We need to ensure that all countries ramp up their efforts to implement this in their respective jurisdiction.

1b. Youth-oriented policies and programs are critical in forwarding the agenda, but we must also put in paper that all policies and programs must be contextualized and sensitive to the cultural norms and traditions of various sectors, especially for indigenous communities. A lot of young people who practice agriculture are from indigenous communities, which is why it is important to ensure inclusivity and special attention to them.

1c. SEARICE believes that almost all countries are already mandated to provide each child's right to adequate education, health, hygiene, and nutrition. What's more important is to see this in the lens of children who are already working in the agriculture and food systems, and in order to help them access these rights, government institutions must be mandated to create policies and programs that will give them special accommodations. One specific example of this is in the Philippines that even though primary, secondary, and tertiary education is free for all, a significant number of young people still can't access it due to extreme poverty or that they are already working to feed their families. One special accommodation program that was innovated was the Alternative Learning System (ALS) which is a modular system that does not require them to regularly report to school. Every year, a test is conducted for them to identify which grade level they belong to. SEARICE believes these accommodation programs given to the youth help them in accessing their rights, especially on education. ⁴

SECURE DIGNIFIED AND REWARDING LIVELIHOODS

2e. Since smallholder farmers are part of the informal economy/sector⁵, labor laws and regulations often do not affect them since they do not have an employer who decides how much they will get paid. But to guarantee humane and livable wages and enhance working conditions for youth in agriculture and food security, governments should create policies that will prioritize local products/produce over imported ones. A deluge of imported produce in the country kills the small holder farmers, it is inevitable that imported product's price would compete with the local ones. The small holder farmers then will have no

⁴ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/philippines/publication/the-philippines-alternative-learning-system-a-second-chance-to-develop-the-human-capital-of-out-of-school-youth-and-adults>

⁵ <https://www.wiego.org/informal-economy/occupational-groups/smallholder-farmers>

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choice but to sell their products in a very low price, with almost zero returns. ⁶ This will consequently push smallholder farmers, especially the youth, to deeper poverty and food insecurity.

INCREASE EQUITABLE ACCESS TO RESOURCES

3a. To reemphasize, it is important for all countries to implement UNDROP and to have implementation frameworks and/or plans in order to reach 3a's goal.

3b. Landlessness is a major issue in terms of agriculture and food. How can we support and facilitate inter-generational transfer of natural and productive resources when they do not even own the land, farming tools, and natural resources they use to farm? Policies and regulations should also focus on land reforms, in helping existing farmers permanently own farmlands which they can pass to the future generations.

3c. In addition to this: strengthen farmer's rights against human rights violations for those who are part of these cooperatives and organizations.

3d. We must ensure that the process and mechanisms in accessing these programs and projects are easily accessible for the youth (e.g, not too time consuming, paper heavy, or laborious). In some cases, in the Philippines, even when these programs are already offered, the youth are disincentivized to go through the process due to heavy and confusing bureaucratic processes. We must take note that the youth in agriculture and food systems already have too much on their plates, so we need to make the process easier and more accessible to them.

3f. SEARICE believes that in order to improve access to market points for the youth, these infrastructures be based on short supply chains that pose lower barriers for youth to enter markets. They have also high potential to drive youth agency based on an equitable sharing of available resources. The zero-draft focusses on "sustainable food supply chains and support youth engagement in price premiums and certification systems...". Alternative markets based on short supply chains should be mentioned at least alongside certification, because they often hold the higher potential for price premiums with lower barriers of entry. This is particularly significant for youth, since youth are often the ones engaged in processing and product development in local value chains, when they don't have access to land to engage in agriculture directly. Participatory Guarantee Systems could also be mentioned next to certification here.

ENHANCE KNOWLEDGE, EDUCATIONS AND SKILLS

4b. For countries who have a wide array of farm fields, farm visits should be required so the youth can see in real life the art and beauty that goes into agriculture and food making. It's not enough to learn the technicalities of it, but it's also ideal for them to experience it. Holding Farmer Field School in primary and secondary education can further entice the youth to pursue agriculture and food systems when they're given the chance to have meaningful conversations with farmers and food producers about agriculture and food system.

⁶ <https://www.searice.org/press/unrestricted-rice-imports-to-kill-small-farmers-says-rice-miller>

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4c. There should also be a specific vocational course on agriculture (e.g. seed propagation, organic farming, etc.). Courses should ensure that it is important to teach topics about agroecology, especially knowledge that is locally specific.⁷

4e. To reiterate, there should be a special emphasis on “knowledge on agroecology that is locally specific” to the youth for it to be relevant and engaging for them.

FOSTER SUSTAINABLE AND INCLUSIVE INNOVATION

It is of dire importance to refer to agroecology and locally specific experiences of agroecological transformation to reach the zero-draft’s goals

The current draft only talks broadly about “sustainable agriculture and food systems”, regarding inclusivity, innovation, and knowledge dissemination it is however crucial to support the diverse potential of local knowledge, experience and innovations through agroecological intensification. Even from a productivism perspective a shift towards diversity-based intensification is important and that can only be rooted in local ecology and conditions. FAO’s 10 Elements of Agroecology could be referenced here.

To end, SEARICE believes that all these provisions, including our additional comments, are necessary to improve the current state of food and agriculture and consequently make it enticing for the youth to join. And for all the policies and programs stated herewith, participatory, and non-discriminatory consultations and discussions with the youth should be a requirement.

ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION:

The **Southeast Asia Regional Initiatives for Community Empowerment (SEARICE)** is a regional non-government organization that promotes sustainable and resilient food systems through ecological agriculture with emphasis on the conservation and development of agricultural biodiversity; and advocates for policies that support, strengthen, and institutionalize community initiatives on sustainable and resilient food systems. It works in partnership with farming communities, local and national government units, civil society organization, and academic and research institutions in Southeast Asia.

⁷ According to the HLPE-recommendation 4 c, d., f.

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