



FAO/19632/G. Bizzarri

# Rural youth: tapping the potential

*The dream of a hunger-free world can come true. Young people, more than a billion strong, can help make it happen. Idealistic, enthusiastic and receptive to new ideas, today's youth are already playing a key role in transforming our world for the better.*

But many of the nearly half billion young people living in rural areas in developing countries never get the chance to realize their full potential. With few opportunities for formal education and training, they don't acquire the skills and confidence they need to free themselves from the grip of hunger, disease and poverty.

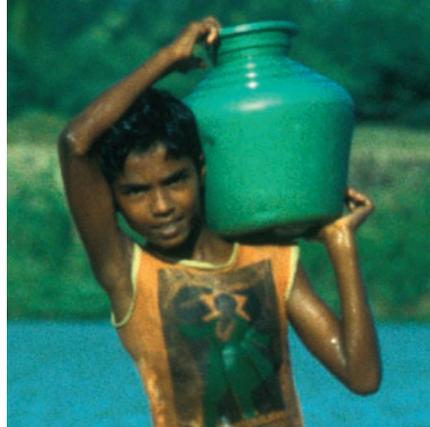
FAO's Rural Youth Development Programme has the mission to provide rural youth the tools and support they need to become healthy individuals and take part in the fight against hunger in their community. It does this by assisting government and non-governmental organizations to set up new rural youth development initiatives and by strengthening and expanding already existing programmes.



Sustainable Development Department  
Extension, Education and Communication Service



FAO/20662/E. Yeves



FAO/17398/G. Torsello



FAO/17946/L. De Matteis

## The case for strong youth networks

FAO's Rural Youth Development Programme works with governments to formulate strong national youth policies. It is difficult for one rural youth programme in a government ministry or non-governmental organization to reach a significant number of young people. That is why FAO's Rural Youth Development Programme encourages countries to build strong networks among its national rural youth organizations, to ensure the greatest possible sharing of information and resources.

The Programme strives consistently to strengthen and expand its own network of partners. Its projects are often carried out in close collaboration with other United Nations agencies as well as international, national and regional organizations.

FAO's rural youth development work is carried out under the umbrella of the United Nations System's World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond. FAO is a member of the United Nations Inter-Agency Working Group on Youth coordinated by the United Nations Youth Unit of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs in New York. FAO

also participates in regular United Nations System World Youth Forums.

### Teaming up to set youth policy in Mali

**In Mali, FAO's Rural Youth Development Programme assists the government in designing a national strategy and action plan to help rural youth find meaningful employment. The Programme works in cooperation with FAO's Technical Cooperation Programme and has involved a wide range of specialists from the fields of youth, agriculture, finance, education and statistics.**

## Learning by experience

Many young people in rural communities in the developing world have extremely limited opportunities for formal schooling. Also, school curricula and textbooks are often designed for urban schools and are irrelevant to rural students.

If rural young people are to take part in community development, they need to learn not only about the technical aspects of farming and other potential livelihoods. They also need to learn how to communicate their ideas confidently, to solve problems for themselves and to take the initiative in dealing with issues that concern them.

To help rural young people develop these skills, FAO's Rural Youth Development Programme supports community-based non-formal educational programmes. These programmes, which can take place almost anywhere – under a tree in a local village, in someone's house, at a community centre – give rural youth opportunities for structured learning outside the formal educational system. FAO provides training and technical assistance in developing teaching materials for these types of educational programmes.

By taking part in practical activities, such as propagating seeds or raising rabbits, young people can learn about a broad range of related subjects. With the skills and confidence acquired through hands-on experience, they can become actively and immediately involved in local development.

### Training young leaders in Namibia

**In Namibia, FAO's Rural Youth Development Programme has helped the government to reach out to youth through a new national development programme for rural youth. During the project's initial phase, young people from rural villages took part in training courses to learn about new farming methods and to gain leadership, communication and group organization skills. After a five-week training period, the young people returned to their villages, where they now volunteer their time teaching others and helping set up rural youth clubs.**

## How young are youth?

For United Nations statistical purposes, anyone between the ages of 15 and 24 is considered a youth. However, FAO's Rural Youth Development Programme believes that youth development activities must start at an earlier age. It concentrates its work on out-of-school youth between the ages of 10 and 25.

## Part of the solution, not part of the problem

Too often governments and decision-makers ignore rural young people when formulating anti-hunger policies. Rural youth are viewed simply as passive recipients of food aid and other assistance. In fact, young people constitute a deep pool of talent and energy that countries can tap into to reach their national development goals in sustainable agriculture, food security, health, nutrition and rural development. They are not part of the problem. They are a big part of the solution.



FAO/18730/G. Bizzarri



FAO/20711/A. Proto



FAO/19578/G. Bizzarri



FAO/17243/E. Amalore

## Growing food and earning a living

Most young people in rural communities in developing countries are actively engaged in food production. But much of this work involves either subsistence farming or menial labour that offers little pay, no job security and limited prospects for advancement. Because of this, many young people are choosing to abandon their homes and farms to look for higher-paying work in the big cities.

FAO's Rural Youth Development Programme supports educational initiatives that build the skills young people need to start up local small-scale agricultural enterprises or other income generating activities. Any type of rural employment, even if not directly related to agriculture, helps reduce poverty and plays an important role in safeguarding local food security.

### Investing in rural youth

In Burkina Faso, FAO prepared a plan of action for a project funded by the United Nations Development Programme to help implement a national strategy for youth employment in rural areas. In carrying out the plan of action, national and provincial governments, village leaders, non-governmental organizations and financial institutions worked together to give young people the training, guidance and credit they need to set up small-scale businesses. By May 2003, local lending institutions had agreed to invest more than US\$93 000 to finance 80 small businesses managed by rural youth.

## Building hope in the fight against AIDS

It is clear that to prevent the spread of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, young people must learn about reproductive health and safe sex practices. But teaching them the facts about HIV/AIDS is often not enough. Research indicates that low self-esteem, despair and loneliness can cause young people to engage in risky sexual behaviour, even if they are aware of AIDS and its consequences.

By bringing rural young people together to take part in group activities that are both informative and fun, and by giving them the experience of achieving individual and common goals, rural youth education programmes help build self-confidence. An increased sense of self-worth and belonging can be a young person's best protection against HIV/AIDS.

### Reaching out to adolescents in Cameroon

In Cameroon, FAO's Rural Youth Development Programme is working with the United Nations Population Fund on a nationwide programme to improve adolescent reproductive health. The programme makes use of games and stories to communicate important information about health care. Equipped with a better understanding of the issues relating to their sexual health, young people involved in the programme are making better use of the reproductive health services offered by district health offices.

## Closing the gender gap in education

Because mothers have traditionally been responsible for passing their learning on to their children, it is vital that young women learn the skills they need to lead healthy lives. However, girls and young women are often at a disadvantage when it comes to education. Girls represent two-thirds of the children who either do not go to school or drop out before completion. FAO's Rural Youth Development Programme is committed to ensuring that both girls and boys and women and men are included in all development initiatives targeting rural youth.

## Campaigning for rural employment

In 2002, the Decade Campaign of Action for Youth Employment was launched at the Youth Employment Summit in Alexandria, Egypt. The campaign's main goals are to build the capacity of young people to create sustainable livelihoods and to establish an entrepreneurial culture in which young people can create their own jobs. FAO's Rural Youth Development Programme is contributing to the campaign by ensuring that the special needs, conditions and aspirations of rural young people are taken into account.

## Getting the word out

The Rural Youth Development Programme's Web site contains basic information about the Programme, updates about its activities and other news items related to rural youth and development.

The Programme also publishes a newsletter, *YouthWorks*. Available in French, Spanish and English, *YouthWorks* is distributed to thousands of professional youth workers around the world. An electronic version can be viewed and downloaded from the Web site.

The Programme also organizes a continuing series of national seminars to raise awareness about the important contributions that young people can make to food security and rural development.



FAO/19667/G. Bizzari



FAO/16138/P. Johnson



FAO/19434/R. Faidutti



Rural Youth Development Programme  
Sustainable Development Department  
Extension, Education and Communication Service  
Tel.: + 39 0657053615  
Fax: + 39 0657053801  
E-mail: [rural-youth@fao.org](mailto:rural-youth@fao.org)  
Web site: [www.fao.org/ruralyouth](http://www.fao.org/ruralyouth)



Food and Agriculture Organization  
of the United Nations  
Viale delle Terme di Caracalla  
00100 Rome, Italy  
[www.fao.org](http://www.fao.org)