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**Supporting life-perspectives and employment of
young people in rural areas**

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List of Abbreviations

ANAFEA	Asociación Nacional para el Fomento de la Agricultura Ecológica
(A)TVET	(Agricultural) Technical and Vocational Training
CDOM	Caritas Development Office of Monrovia
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
ILO	International Labour Organization
LIC	Low Income Country
MENA	Middle East and North Africa Region
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
VSLA	Village Savings and Loan Association

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1 Introduction

1.1 Preface

FAKT Consult has developed and funded this paper to explore approaches and practices set out to support young people in rural areas to become productive members of rural societies. We believe this includes enabling young people to create a livelihood and generate a decent income which does not harm, but is in harmony with their environmental, material and social environment. In this regard, this paper focuses not only on the promotion of employment of young people, but on enabling young people to construct their own life and work perspectives which concurrently provide them with economic subsistence and a personal feeling of sense.

We understand this paper as a “discussion paper” that may include controversial theses, to which we are inviting feedback for further discussion and elaboration of this paper. We also invite readers to contribute case studies and descriptions of approaches that have proven to be effective in promoting youth perspectives in rural areas.

1.2 What is a rural area?

According to a definition of OECD, rural areas are characterised by small and disperse settlements and a population density of less than 150 inhabitants/km² (OECD, 1994: 22). Regions with a local settlement structure in which communities with less than 150 inhabitants/km² comprise between 15 and 50%, are called “significantly rural regions”, while areas with more than 50% are defined as “predominantly rural regions”. This pragmatic and practical definition allows for a transparent and clear differentiation for all actors. With regard to additional specific characteristics of rural areas, it has been observed that – compared to urban societies - rural communities are usually marked by a more intensive social cohesion and interaction, a closer relation to and stronger dependence on the surrounding nature and an economy which is less specialised with regard to work and production processes (Bätzing, 2020: 220). In many rural regions in the Global South, agriculture still plays the predominant role in economic, social and cultural life.

1.3 Employment in rural areas

Economic opportunities and employment trends in rural vs. urban areas:

The 2006 OECD policy brief on rural policies (OECD, 2006) highlights that rural areas in OECD states achieved only 83% of the economic performance of urban areas in 2000 (measured by GDP per capita), even further decreasing during the following decade. At the same time, the OECD report mentions strong discrepancies between the rural regions investigated and underlines that with regard to the creation of employment, in a third of the OECD countries rural regions performed better as compared to respective urban regions (OECD, 2006: 2). OECD regards the improvement of the physical and communication infrastructure as important factors for the diversification of economic activities and the creation of employment opportunities in rural areas, as for example an improved transport or communication network helps to link rural areas to new markets. It is assumed that this tendency has tremendously increased after the publication of the paper until today.

In the Global South, the discrepancy between the economic growth of urban and rural areas is even more pronounced. It is widely understood that this trend has made particularly young people move to cities in search for economic and social opportunities, looking for further education and better jobs, potentially becoming more productive as they move from subsistence agriculture to industry and services. Yet, it is not fully understood whether “pull factors” (greater livelihood opportunities in cities)

are the most dominant factor for rural – urban migration and rapid urbanisation. In countries with instability and conflict or rapid climate change effects, “push factors” may be the primary cause for populations to migrate. The Africa Growth Initiative states in its working paper on urban economic growth in Africa that “urbanization is a key feature of growth and structural change in low-income countries, but African cities have left a large majority of their populations without productive jobs” (AGI, 2020: 1). While some country statistics (for instance Ethiopia, Namibia, Tanzania) indicate that rural – urban transition led to a substantial income growth as people grasp new employment opportunities in cities, in unstable countries (DR of Congo, Liberia, Zimbabwe) the GDP per capita had dropped in cities (City Monitor, 2021).

Characteristics of and trends in rural employment:

Concerning the characteristics of rural employment, the past decades has shown that the importance of agriculture as a source of employment has declined especially in lower-middle income countries. For example, in Sub-Sahara Africa, the employment ratio declined from 63% in 1990 to 53% in 2019 (World Bank, 2021). For rural areas in Latin America, ILO (2019) reports an agricultural employment rate of 66% in 2005 and of 58% in 2014 (s. table 1). The picture is however different in low-income countries (LICs) where the changes observed are minimal: For example, in African low-income countries such as Burundi, Burkina Faso or Malawi, close to 80% of the labour force works in agriculture, while in Tanzania and Ethiopia, the proportion is still more than 60%. In an average African country, the agriculture sector employs

Table 1: Latin America (14 countries): Employed population by geographic area and economic sector, 2005 and 2014 (percentages)
(Source: ILO, 2019)

	2005			2014		
	National	Urban	Rural	National	Urban	Rural
Primary Sector	21.4	7.4	67.1	16.8	5.8	59.1
Agriculture	20.8	6.9	66.3	16.1	5.2	58.3
Mining	0.6	0.5	0.8	0.7	0.6	0.9
Secondary Sector	21.1	24.0	11.6	21.2	23.2	13.4
Tertiary Sector	57.6	68.6	21.3	62.0	70.9	27.4

54% of the working population (FES, 2021: 13) as compared to 35% in Asia (ILO, 2017: 42)¹. Thus, despite the slow decline in the proportion for total employment, agriculture in Africa remains the main source for employment and continues – due to the strong population growth rates of roughly 30 million new labour market entrants per year – to grow in absolute numbers. Studies conducted in India (Chand et al., 2014) show that 68% of the rural employment has been in agriculture². The 2020 worldwide employment rate in agriculture in rural areas is still at 49%. Despite the noticeable trend of a declining proportion of agriculture in the overall employment rates of the Global South, **absolute figures show that a very high portion of employment in general and in rural areas in particular is generated by the agricultural sector**. Consequently, an overwhelming share of the working population’s livelihood in the Global South, especially in LICs, is primarily based on agriculture, and specifically on small-scale farming, which is employing and feeding the vast majority of the rural population.

While, as noted above, agriculture is the mainstay for rural people, **rural communities increasingly depend on other sources of income, outside the agricultural sector**. Wage workers constitute 40% of the Latin-American rural population, with a share of 5,6% in public services and 32% in the private

¹ Definitely these figures are even higher in rural areas.

² Even though declining from 78% in the year 1994

sector³. This process has however been much slower and more unsustainable for Africa where only 29% of those employed are wage workers while the vast majority of 68% works as contributing family member or own-account worker (2019). Given the high proportion of subsistence farming, these proportions are even believed to be much higher for rural areas.

According to global statistical data, **90% of the total employment in developing countries is informal**, with 73% for non-agricultural employment. Informal employment is characterised by the absence of any job and income security, as well as social security benefits such as health insurance or pension benefits. A study of the informal sector in the West Bank (Palestinian Territory) shows that 95% of employment in agriculture is informal, despite the existence of modern farms producing for the market. For Africa, it is estimated that a staggering 95% of young African workers both in rural and urban areas are in informal employment. Informal employment is comprised of unpaid family work, self-employment in small-scale farms and micro-businesses, petty trading, and day labour in agriculture and other sectors such as construction. The figures above imply that the vast majority of the working population in rural areas are informally employed.

Another important characteristic of rural employment is seasonality. In agriculture most crops are seasonal, resulting in working patterns specific to rural people. Thus, a large proportion of rural workers do work in more than one job, often as part-time seasonal (non-farming) workers and part-time farmers. A common phenomenon in Asia is seasonal labour migration: in the north east of India, the poorest region of the country, many rural men seek temporary or seasonal employment in the construction industry in the booming parts of the country, while women stay behind and manage the farms. The COVID crisis has temporarily stopped and reversed labour migration patterns, with severe consequences for the livelihood of rural populations. This part-time occupation may enrich experiences on the one hand, yet - if practiced for a working life - it definitely prevents specialisation within one professional area. Therefore, lifelong part-time work usually stands for the perpetuation of a low income and a precarious social security system.

With regard to education and training, ILO (2016: 30) shares the observation that the rural labour force has a significantly and persistently low education and training level. This holds particularly true for women, who are often forced to leave school early to work (without controlling their income), get married and have children. While the urban workforce consists of “only” 23% of workers with no or only basic education in 2014, this figure rises to 58% for the rural areas of Latin America (though formal basic education is sometimes not as relevant for the world of work and often even alienates students from their actual environment⁴). This gap in quality and quantity of education is extended if we look into the practical skills training in agriculture and agriculture related fields. For a long time, Agriculture Technical and Vocational Education and Training (ATVET) was severely neglected, which is currently changing. ATVET is receiving more attention, but the content and design of training is often directed towards agri-businesses and less to the small-holder contexts. Furthermore, as discussed below in this paper, rural female and male youth face substantial challenges enrolling in TVET programmes due to limited availability, education barriers and costs of training (ILO, 2020). This situation is worrying if we see that we are proceeding towards societies and production processes with ever higher demands for shared information, technology and entrepreneurial thinking. Especially agriculture needs to develop new and creative models of diversified income generation because otherwise there is the risk seeing rural regions declining to pure raw-material production areas dominated by large scale industrial agriculture that requires only a fraction of the current labour force, consequently contributing to the global employment crisis.

³ 21% of them working in microenterprises

⁴ In many curricula of elementary and higher school systems, the immediate natural and social environment is not a relevant subject. In many Latin American countries, this alienation is obvious in the fact that students of higher education are experts in European history, while the history of Latin America and their own region stays unknown to them.

Gender discrepancies in rural life and employment:

The employment situation in rural areas looks quite different for men and women. Life in rural areas is often characterised by strong traditional gender stereotypes and a gendered division of responsibilities within the family. This means that women primarily bear the responsibility for reproduction activities (e.g., raising children, caring for the elderly/sick family members, household chores) which leaves them with less time and energy to pursue income-generating activities – which, for the most part, they do regardless as additional income is needed to sustain the family. FAO (2010) summarises the difference between men and women’s employment situation in rural areas as follows: ‘Agriculture continues to be the main source of rural employment for both women and men in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and Southeast Asia. In Latin America, rural female workers appear equally distributed between agricultural and non-agricultural sectors (with self-employment more prevalent in agriculture than in manufacturing and services), while rural men work mostly in agriculture, either as self-employed or wage workers. In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, rural women work mostly as self-employed in agriculture and rural men work mostly as non-agricultural wage earners. Non-agricultural activities are the main source of employment for both men and women in Central Asia and Europe, where the majority of the rural population works as wage employees. In most regions, rural women seem more likely than rural men to be engaged in self-employment or as unpaid family labour (and thus less likely to be wage earners)’ (FAO, 2010: 4). In 2000, the World Bank compiled data on the employment situation of women and men by drawing on 66 different country-level household surveys (World Bank, 2007). Table 2 below summarises the findings. It is striking that a large part of rural women is classified as either ‘non-active’ or ‘not reported’. This reflects that a large percentage of rural women’s work is either informal or unpaid and remains unrecorded – thus, their contribution to the rural economy is largely underestimated (ILO, 2018). As a consequence, women lack control over productive assets (e.g., agricultural machinery), legal ownership (e.g., land) and cash – challenges that we will outline below.

Table 2: Rural employment by gender and employment status, 2000 (percent of the adult population) (Source: World Bank 2007)

	Sub-Sahara Africa		South Asia		East Asia and the Pacific		MENA		Europe and Central Asia		Latin America & Caribbean	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Agriculture	54.9	60.6	24.1	54.9	44.1	56.2	39.6	34.0	12.3	18.6	25.1	59.3
Self-Employed	53.3	56.6	12.7	33.1	38.4	46.8	38.6	24.6	6.9	8.5	22.8	38.4
Wage earner	1.4	4.0	11.4	21.8	5.7	9.4	1.0	9.4	5.4	10.1	2.3	20.9
Non-agriculture	9.6	15.5	5.6	27.2	19.7	28.9	6.7	39.7	19.7	38.7	23.2	26.4
Self-Employed	6.8	6.9	2.9	11.8	11.3	11.5	2.8	8.8	1.6	7.4	11.7	9.2
Wage earner	2.8	8.6	2.7	15.4	8.4	17.4	3.9	30.9	18.1	31.3	11.5	17.2
Non-active or not reported	32.7	21.7	64.3	14.6	35.5	14.4	53.3	26.0	46.9	27.5	51.2	13.4
Total	97.2	97.8	94.0	96.7	99.3	99.5	99.6	99.7	78.9	84.8	99.5	99.1
Residual	2.8	2.2	6.0	3.3	0.7	0.5	0.4	0.3	21.1	15.2	0.5	0.9

Supporting the data in Table 2, ILO estimates that women constitute 41% of the agricultural work force globally, with up to 49% in some low-income countries (ILO, 2018). At the same time, gender inequality remains prevalent in the agricultural sector. ILO and other organisations struggle to quantify gender

equality as there is limited data available. This applies in particular to the socio-economic opportunity costs that occur for not involving women. Nevertheless, ILO (2018) and UN Women (2012) identify the following key challenges for working women in rural areas:

1. Women primarily work in low-skilled, low-productivity, and low or even unpaid jobs with long working hours, poor working conditions and little or none social protection.
2. Rural women have less access to productive resources (e.g., improved seeds and fertilizers), assets (e.g., land, agricultural machinery), services (e.g., extension and financial services) and infrastructure (e.g., access to processing and transport infrastructure).
3. Rural women have less opportunities for education and training in agriculture.
4. Rural women have less decision-making power as they are under-represented in institutions and leadership.

1.4 Social and material conditions of rural youth

The threshold from youth to adulthood is marked by three variables (White, 2019: 8):

1. Completion of education,
2. Marriage and family formation,
3. Economic independence from the parental generation.

Defining youth as such already provides a first idea of the social situation of young people. Moreover, it provides a more fluid perspective on youth compared to defining it as a certain age in the lifetime of a person. With youth defined in this way, White (2019) states that one of the key characteristics of present's youth is their inability to pass this threshold into adulthood up into their thirties. Lacking a clear life perspective, including economic security and thus the possibility to settle, young people continue education in endless loops, engage in low (or no) income internships and thus keep on being dependent on the parental generation. Yet, in many low-income countries in Africa the situation differs slightly in that many young people simply cannot afford to continue education but are forced to take up income generating activities of any sort, mostly low-paid and of informal nature but similarly with no clear perspective nor economic security. This of course is valid for urban and rural youth alike. For many young women, this period of their life is dominated by leaving school early, getting married and having children. So, while they might also lack this clear life perspective, they are also denied choice as gender norms and traditions often determine their fate, in particular in rural areas.

Dependency on the older generation in rural areas is expressed by the marginal influence of young people, particularly women, within policy processes and by their lack of access to means of production – land in the majority of cases. According to White (2019: 21) 'it is estimated that today women only comprise 20 per cent of all landholders in developing countries and when they do control land, they tend to have smaller plots and lower-quality land'.

Also, rural societies tend to be adult-age dominated, with little room for young people to participate and influence decision-making processes in their communities and extended families. While this finding applies to both, young women and men, young women are most severely excluded. The low visibility of young women's needs and ideas leads to an adult-age and male agenda setting in local development processes, creating a vicious cycle for the young generation of "being hardly represented" to "not at all taken into consideration". Interestingly, UNICEF's recent survey of gender socialisation in adolescence concludes that adolescence is a crucial period for 'investment and intervention towards achieving more equitable outcomes for girls and boys...'. In fact, adolescence is a critical period in which gendered attitudes and behaviours intensify and new gender roles and responsibilities appear. This period of rapid change within and around the individual is a crucial to achieve more equitable outcomes for girls and boys, and later in life for women and men. Furthermore, today's adolescents will play a

lead role in achieving development targets, including the Sustainable Development Goals; the ways in which the gender socialization process is shaped by this cohort will influence future generations (John et al., 2017: 36).

The generally very low inclusion of young people into processes of political discussion and decision-making at community level thus prevents that one of the decisive barriers for life-perspective development is tackled: the lack of access to land and resources during youth.

Yet, looking closer at the situation of rural youth, there is also an aspect that differentiates the picture. For the absence of many services and functions, young people usually take over responsibilities within the adult society early in life, thus gaining self-confidence and opportunities to take over leadership roles. Crocket (2000: 48) talks of „undermanned“ environments that require a considerably high involvement of young adolescents in social activities, including leadership functions, in their communities. As additional characteristic, rural youths often display a relatively strong sense of belonging to their home-communities as well as strong social networks among their peer-groups and within their families (Hoyt et. al., 1995).

Given this controversial situation, the observed ambivalence of many young rural people of whether to stay or to go when reaching teen age, is quite understandable. Hierarchical structures and structures of ownership and inequality within the communities and regions conflict with their social and psychological ties to their rural home places, preventing thus to develop well-founded life-perspectives.

1.5 Young people and agriculture

Given the above-described fact that employment in rural areas is still found predominantly in agriculture, it is worth to reflect on the relationship of youth and agriculture more specifically. There is a multitude of studies concluding that the aspirations of young rural people are to leave rural areas and agriculture and to find secure and salaried white- or blue-collar jobs (Leavy & Hossain, 2014; OECD, 2017; Elias et al., 2018; BMZ, 2017; Melchers & Büchler, 2017). The overwhelming desire of young people (and their parents!) seems to be passing higher education and to move into a professional world of high-quality employment. Again, the picture is different between young men and women, as traditional roles as mother and wife still dominate the perspectives for girls. However, most of the overwhelmingly negative aspirations of young people towards rural areas and agriculture are results of interviews within social group situations (peer-group, adults). Zipin argues that within these situations, answers may “be subject to social acceptability filters, [...] and norms about universally acceptable, “worthy” futures”, reflecting only to a minor part individual visions and hopes of the young people (Zipin et al., 2015).

Analysing these studies and linking the results back to the above-described situation of rural youth, White (2019) elaborates a number of conclusions that can help to work on approaches for acceptable support offers for young people in rural areas:

1. Very often job and life aspirations of young people are far away from reality and available jobs cannot fulfil these aspirations. “Young people in developing countries enter the labor market with high career aspirations. [...] most students aspire to work for the public sector and in highly skilled professions.” (OECD 2017: 9). Often, many young people are encouraged by their families to take up academic studies due to the low image of technical training and agricultural work. Since job opportunities for higher education graduates are however often limited, they eventually return to farming. This of course leads in many cases to painful and bitter deceptions and is one of the reasons that make transition from school/university to work so difficult.
2. Even though education has proved in the past in many cases to be the staircase into salaried white-collar jobs in urban areas, this is less and less the case at present. There are observers who talk of “waithood” (Honwana, 2014) or “timepass” (Jeffrey, 2010), as especially for the rural youth, the

human capital theory seems not to apply anymore. Young people make the experience that good education is only one prerequisite to find one of the aspired and secure positions. Without family networks, contacts and relevant prior work experience, these jobs tend to be far away especially for young rural people. There are more or less four options for the young educated:

- a. They engage in low or unpaid internships for longer periods in order to gain the required on-the-job experience (Galam, 2018).
 - b. They continue to study in order to gain a higher qualification or to specialise in other fields, hoping to find an entry into the job-market within the time to come (Jeffrey, 2010).
 - c. They accept jobs that are far below their educational capacities, often including hard physical work and meagre payment.
 - d. They return to their villages to help their parents on the fields. This occupation is often perceived as a bitter time passing, waiting for the desired city-job to emerge, and very often resulting in an endless loop of lethargic working and time-passing that can end up in a psychological downwards spiral for the individual (“considering oneself as a loser”). However, at the same time, there are many cases where young home-comers decide to take the chance, engage and start a rural career, either in agriculture or applying his/her skills gained in the city to different but sometimes very creative fields.
3. However, from studies using individual and anonymous methods to identify young people’s aspirations (BMZ, 2017; Melchers & Büchler, 2017), another, more differentiated picture concerning agriculture emerges. Here, especially young men could imagine a rural and agricultural life for themselves, provided that they could invest and use technology, that they would be trained and could train themselves adequately, that they could get land and that the reputation of agriculture would improve. Observations hint at the increasing realisation among young people that entrepreneurial activities in agriculture can provide opportunities for income generation. Peters (2011: 203) concludes that: “the dislike of rural youth for agriculture is not focused on agriculture as such, but on their vulnerability, on the village conditions, on their exploitation by local elites and gerontocrats.” This is not surprising as they need to navigate two ‘political’ environments, (1) the traditional system and (2) formal government regulations which creates insecurities and increases costs. This observation is supported by the above-mentioned stronger rejection of rural life by young women, compared to young men. As a matter of fact, they are the ones with the least opportunities in rural societies to develop and realise a decent life perspective.

2 Approaches and best practices in the promotion of young rural people’s life perspectives

Given this situation of low employment opportunities and high outmigration rates from the rural world as well as the under-representation of interests of young people in rural development, a growing number of multilateral (IFAD and ILO) and bilateral development actors (e.g. German International Cooperation - GIZ) as well as non-governmental actors do not only invest into youth employment promotion in rural areas but also have started to consider options to support rural young people through a more complex approach that aims at developing and strengthening life-perspectives and social rootage of young people in their rural environments. As we could see above, these efforts have to deal with a series of pressing causes which make young leave their rural home regions. At the same time, studies indicate the existing strong binding forces that could be augmented to help young people developing a life-perspective at their often agriculturally characterised regions.

The following chapter presents a number of approaches that address either (a) the negative root causes for the lack of perspectives (e.g. lacking access to resources for entrepreneurial activities, not having a voice in communal affairs) or (b) the increase in binding forces like developing skills and entrepreneurial capacities that are lacking, strengthening self-confidence of young people and social cohesion. Some of the practices show a combination of both, strategies for youth employment and perspective promotion. The practice examples presented below have either been developed and implemented with consultancy support of FAKT or been observed on evaluation missions by FAKT experts, who were specifically impressed by the approaches and effects of the projects assessed. The list of project examples below shall be expanded in further dialogue with development practitioners.

Rural youth camps and youth groups promoting social cohesion, own experiences in agroecological practices and political activity on local level:

The ANAFAE (*Asociación Nacional para el Fomento de la Agricultura Ecológica*) network in Honduras, the Cosmopolitana Foundation and the Pastoral Social Pasto in Colombia, as well as ECOTOP foundation in Bolivia and the NGO CDOM (Caritas Development Office of Monrovia) have realised within the last couple of years that the development of rural life perspectives of young people starts with the simple act of focusing development interventions on youth. *Pastoral Social Pasto* as well as CDOM started activities with the organisation of youth camps for rural teens. Both organisations were overwhelmed by the interest and the success of these camps that have been continued in the following years with growing participant numbers. Both rural development NGOs worked and practiced with their participants on agroecological topics, placing an integrated approach of agricultural and rural development at the centre of their considerations.



For the young participants, most of them children of small-scale farming families, the idea and practice of new and different approaches to agriculture and rural living was attractive for different reasons. Firstly, there is the new understanding of agriculture as an activity embedded in natural processes of growing with the agriculturist as a person, who understands and supports these processes for producing. As a participant of a youth agroforestry course of ECOTOP put it: "I never saw myself as a farmer, but realising now, that it is much more observing nature and not only toiling, it is a different thing for

me." Secondly, ANAFAE initiated groups of young people in communities, presenting them this different narrative of agriculture as an activity of observers and experimenters, protecting nature and harnessing natural processes for agricultural production. The accompaniment of the youth group that was offered by a technician as well as the dedication of the young people helped to convince the parents of a couple of young people to leave parts of their land to the management of the groups. This in turn provided areas for the realisation and observation of own practices and thus to experience results and effects of own activities. A third cause for the motivation of the young people was obviously the use of modern communication media that are attractive and most commonly used by them for socialising and networking. Discovering networks of young rural dwellers in other regions who practice and experiment with agroecological practices and establishing own networks after camps or meetings, to stay in contact, exchange experiences and receive tips for their agricultural practice has proven fascinating for young people and shows that live in the rural regions does not have to be boring and backward.

Another interesting finding going beyond an agriculture branded as new and modern, is that many of the participants of these youth initiatives find it increasingly attractive to live in rural areas and to take

up responsibility for the future of their respective region. Feeling united with peers and to have the possibility to influence the development, young people start to appreciate rural life once again. Or as a young man, having lived for some years in the city, stated: “It is always said that life is in the city, but in fact it is here in the countryside that we live with everything that is around us, the growing of plant, the nature and everything.”

Rural networks of young people and youth groups, often initiated, encouraged and sometimes accompanied for some time by rural development organisations, proved to develop an incredible creativity, a sense of cohesion, a readiness for concrete action and responsibility and an identification with their social and natural environment that is overwhelming. Young people having been trained and brought together at the *Cosmopolitana Foundation* in Colombia, kept networking and founded informal local youth initiatives, dedicating themselves to collaborating regularly, exchanging experiences on innovations they tested and initiating small farmers markets in the municipality centres.



Having learned to develop so-called “life plans” in the camps of the Pastoral Social of Pasto (Colombia), young people started to elaborate these life plans within their families and local peer-groups. Having started with concrete actions to realise their life plans on a local level, they attracted the attention of local decision makers and were invited to support and take responsibility for development planning on community and municipality level.

Student projects and incubation programmes to raise young peoples’ abilities to plan and implement their projects

In Serbia, as well as in other countries in the South East of Europe, youth migration from rural to urban areas and even to foreign countries is draining the countryside. Rural areas are considered by young people to be lost areas. It is therefore that vocational secondary schools with an agricultural and food-processing focus in Serbia suffer the image of last resort for the ones who have not been able to qualify for the direct road to university. With the internalisation of this image, rural students of these schools need a real motivation-boost in order to set free their potentialities.

The Youth Employment Project in Serbia, that was implemented by GIZ with consultancy support of FAKT, facilitated a triangle-cooperation of selected agricultural vocational schools, local municipalities and a national NGO that primarily aimed at promoting self-employment of graduates of agricultural schools. The project measures did not only aim at developing the basic entrepreneurial skills, it also unleashed self-motivation and creativity of the students to develop perspectives for themselves in their own community. Last year agricultural and food processing students were trained in envisioning business ideas, concretising them into practicable plans and defining steps for implementation of the business project. Thus, all of the students were provided with the necessary hands-on skills to plan and to start a small and profitable project for income generation



in the given rural environment. Based on defined selection criteria, the most viable student projects were selected for a seed money grant that helped to start and continue realisation of the business ideas.

Projects receiving grants included self-service flower fields at the roadside, an egg delivery service, marketing of vegetables in delivery boxes, or first steps in developing agritourism. The projects did not only help young people to create a hands-on perspective for a rural existence, it also provided them with an enormous boost in enthusiasm and self-confidence. It was obvious that the time in life to address young people with this kind of initiative was well chosen, for latest during this last year of schooling the decision of the students is ripening to leave home for work or studies elsewhere or to stay and develop a life in their region of origin.

Connecting young graduates with opportunities for practical skills and job opportunities: guided internship programs for university graduates

A typical dilemma in labour markets is the scarcity of experienced experts on one side and the high unemployment of graduates on the other. This is also evident in the agriculture sector in Serbia: Agriculture related companies specifically in the processing and marketing sector are looking desperately for management staff who can deal with specific challenges in the sector and who have the ability to bring forward development in a fast-changing business environment. These companies have experienced that the older staff, albeit being well experienced in their jobs, have difficulties with grasping and adapting to the accelerated change like increasing influence of EU regulations, growing chances through EU-market participation, growing options and the increasing digitalisation in production and marketing. On the other hand, young and trained professionals during and after university studies have these skills, yet they mostly miss literally any contact with the working world. This situation is pronounced in the young and fast-growing sector of ecologically produced food. With support of the Youth Employment Project implemented by GIZ and with consultancy support of FAKT, Serbia Organika, an association of ecological producers, launched an internship-program that brought together dedicated companies of the sector and university students in their last two study years. The program was elaborate in the way that collaborating companies would provide a concise description of what they need and what they could offer an intern. Interns on the other side were matched on these demands, according to their capacities and their desires. During the six-month internship, students and responsible staff in the companies were accompanied by the contact person of Serbia Organika. Despite a situation of high unemployment of graduates of the agricultural faculty, the project substantially improved the employment prospects of the interns: 13 out of 20 interns were employed by the companies upon completion of the internship while others received the possibility for part time cooperation and partnerships during their PhD studies.

Establishment of rural business hubs

The rural hub provides answers to the needs of young people to meet peers, to interact and exchange, and at the same time to develop and implement concrete ideas for an economic existence on the countryside. The hub offers a space to come together, provides working environments to be shared (functioning office spaces with IT equipment, workshops with specific tools) and thus is a combination of socialising and business-incubation area.

The **HOPin Academy** in Ghana was established in 2013 to curb the menace of rural urban migration and also reduce the rate of youth unemployment (<https://www.hopinacademy.org/>). HOPin Academy, being a social enterprise, operates innovation hubs in Tamale, a fast-growing city in the northern region of Ghana, as well as in two other northern regions which have been lagging behind in economic development when compared to the capital Accra and the central part of the country. The innovation hubs provide space for entrepreneurship and digital skills training, digital communication and business advisory services (tailor made business-to-consumers as well as business-to-business services). The innovation hub with its incubation centre does not only enable young people to realise their business ideas, it also supports to create an entrepreneurial eco-system and network of young entrepreneurs that reaches out to rural areas and that creates rural – urban linkages. It fosters the development of agri-

preneurs and links them with Techpreneurs for exploration of new digital business ideas such as e-marketing of agricultural products. To this end, they offer 5-week training courses in a wide range of transferable skills (web design, graphics, digital storytelling, online communication, online marketing and accounting software) for professionals and entrepreneurs as well as mentorship programmes through facilitating access to mentors from the local and international business community with expertise and experience in various fields. Since 2014, the innovation hubs assisted in creating 86 businesses that provide employment and income opportunities for young people and social living perspectives in a variety of sectors.

While employment outcomes of rural hubs may not be significant in numbers, they can yield wider impacts through a social activation of the rural youth, having the opportunity to come together in a place of creation, development and support. Furthermore, hubs have the potential to link a young urban business community with entrepreneurs in rural areas.

Promoting rural-based social enterprises

The idea of enterprises that pursue business and social goals is not new – but it gains momentum across the globe. In this section we show brief examples of social enterprises that address employment and life perspectives of young people in rural areas:

The rural, farmer-owned company **Living Blue** in Bangladesh started as a governance project of the NGO CARE. It soon grew into an enterprise that employs around 3,000 farmers who cultivate Indigo as well as around 200 artisans and dyers, who produce Indigo-dyed fabrics. The company today supplies a global market and high-end retailers such as Galleries Lafayette in Paris.

3 Making rural youth promotion work - Basic elements for supporting the development of employment and life perspectives of young people in rural areas

The provided examples show that the promotion of employment and life perspectives of youth in rural areas can work very effectively and successfully. Learning from these examples and the above study findings allows to identify and describe success factors for the design of projects, programmes and policies. This chapter starts with general success factors and then zooms into success factors for employment promotion in rural contexts.

General success factors:

- **Focus on youth and listen to young people**

We consider this as the basic factor which translates into a variety of opportunities, starting on a very personal level. In many occasions, it is the adults who talk about youth and to the young people, providing them with their own ideas of what is good for them instead of really listening to them and focusing on their arguments. Reversing this attitude, at least at some occasions, can provide a boost in young people's self-esteem and self-confidence and for the adult a gain of insightful ideas and sometimes even a new perspective on the world.

On project and programme level, specifically in rural development, the focus is most often placed on sectors, on institutions and on resources. The youth occurs, if at best, only as a target group. This means in more concrete terms that the focus is on the development of value chains or; more holistically, the promotion of agroecology. Young people of course play a role in the development of these topics. However, we usually do not identify them as subjects i.e. as young people who want to develop their own life perspectives, but as passive actors in the development of something else. This is being reflected in most rural development projects through the lack of objectives focusing on the promotion of young people as such. Changing the focus would mean to start with the idea

of promoting youth and only in a second step (maybe even in a dialogue with them) to think of the sectors and institutions that are necessary to be developed to this end.

- **Support and strengthen youth integration in social and natural environment**

Compared to urban dwellers, young rural citizens have stronger relations to their social and natural environment. This is weakened almost all over the world with centralisation of schooling and alienation of the school curricula away from immediate and practical knowledge to master a life in rural surroundings. On the other hand, this social cohesion and embeddedness is strengthened by well-functioning family structures as well as by clubs and associations of a variety of local and national organisations (religious, professional, others), offering thus platforms for the youth to meet, exchange and learn. However, there are as well many areas in the rural world, where larger family structures are breaking up and where youth-platforms are vanishing together with a decreasing presence of traditional institutions.

Strengthening embeddedness of the youth within their rural surroundings therefore has a number of possible starting points. On all levels (ministries, teachers, parents) efforts are needed to bring in local and practical aspects into the students' curricula, reorienting their focus towards their immediate surroundings and opportunities⁵. Strengthening families and neighbourhoods is another entry point, especially in those areas where natural disasters, conflicts and/or strong migration have already weakened these structures. A third option is the establishment and strengthening of local and regional platforms that allow young people to meet, to learn and to develop social and economic perspectives within their close or wider environment.

- **Give youth chances to develop reality-based job- and life-aspirations by acquainting them with these realities early in life**

One of the commonly experienced flaws in higher education worldwide is its missing relation to the working practice. However, what is true for university education, starts already a lot earlier in educational life and is one reason for the big mismatch between job aspirations and job reality, and even for the strong disconnection between the educational and world of work. Efforts to bridge this gap have to start with changes in curricula and learning environments and obviously a lot is on the way in order to improve the situation. And even if the whole of educational careers cannot be transformed into two-pillar "practice-theory-systems", it is possible to open windows and doors for students into practical working life, providing them with possibilities to experience job reality, gather impressions that can clarify theory and make it more tangible and finally help them to develop an understanding of a professional future that is closer to reality than today. Exposing young people to practical work experience through internships or apprenticeships requires a close cooperation of training institutions with the private sector, including on the issue of funding these programmes.

- **Provide access to land / productive assets, enable self-determination and leadership**

The analysis is clear and little encouraging (Peters, 2011; Ansell, 2016: 315). Youth, in particular young women, in rural regions have little or no access to material and immaterial productive assets⁶. Land as the predominant means of production is usually owned by the elder male generation and in most cases this generation also decides on how to use this land. However, any effort to engage and motivate youth to develop a life perspective in rural areas and in agriculture starts at this junction: Providing them with the power to meet effective and productive decisions, in an accompanied environment at the beginning and with growing responsibility by themselves. Efforts into this direction do not need to overturn given power relations and structures of ownership in the beginning. However, they need to provide possible procedures for processes of growing trust: Trust of the older generation that youth and young people are able to work

⁵ "Today's generation of farmers, scientists, teachers.... have collectively failed to trigger my generations imagination" (Panday, D., 2013: It's up to us. In: Farming Matters, June, 2013, p.27).

⁶ like specific knowledge or research capacities

effectively, that their sometimes different approaches to production and life can be successful, that youth and especially the concerned young people are not going to let them down. These efforts need to create trust among the young people into themselves, helping them to build up productive knowledge and experiences in an accompanied environment, supporting them to grow professionally and personally. These processes of growing trust among young people in themselves as well as between generations should ultimately stimulate the intergenerational passing over of responsibility and a clear vision of development for young people.

- **Support youth to get hold of resources and create rooms to unleash their creativity**

Three categories of resources are essential for young people to develop their perspectives: (a) their own personal resources and competences (of a person or a group) like creativity, energy and the ability to collaborate and (b) the access to production resources like land, machines and technical infrastructure and (c) technical knowledge and skills to work and earn. Only through the interplay of these three types of resources, productive employment can emerge and life perspectives can improve. Thus, for projects promoting youth employment and the wider youth perspectives in rural contexts where formal labour markets hardly exist, it is necessary to create spaces, platforms, groups or associations etc. that are linked with a direct access to the second and third type of resources. This is shown in the example of hubs as well as in the example of rural youth groups and cooperatives. It is the idea of the hubs to provide space for young people to come together as well as to be provided with an economic working space (IT with internet connectivity, workshop with a basic equipment to use collectively) and to receive technical support if needed. And it is the idea of the practicing agro-ecology youth groups to create this social room of free interaction combined with the opportunity to develop and implement own serious agricultural production projects with the guidance and accompaniment of an experienced advisor.

- **Address “stayers”, “returnees” and “newcomers”**

Looking at young people in rural environments, it is possible to distinguish three groups:

1. **Stayers:** This group consists of the ones that have decided to stay in their given environment, partly (a) because they can envisage a life-perspective for themselves, or (b) partly because they do not see any perspective “out there” and life at home seems still more secure than in unknown regions of the country or of the world. Very often, these young people are not very well educated and do not see themselves as risk-takers. The majority of rural women fall into this group, because their family and social environment does not consider investment into their education worthwhile and rather foresees a traditional role for them as head of the household, mother and wife – with income-generating obligations on top.
2. **The second group are “returnees.** In many cases they have shorter or longer migration experiences – which can include international as well as internal migration -, either for seasonal work or for longer periods of living and working in urban areas. Most of them have made a considerable array of experiences in their life. In many cases, they return with experiences of urban life and production patterns different to the rural context. On the other hand, many of them have experienced that work life can be harsh and that a person can lose him- or herself easily in the dynamism of urban life. Some of them experience negative psychological effects (“feel like losers”), not having accomplished what they longed for, some of them are still waiting for the next chance to migrate elsewhere, spending their time in their parents’ homes without developing a real perspective for themselves. Still, there is as well a fraction in this group that is dedicated after all to create and work on an economic and social existence within their home environment.
3. Although rather restricted to the East European and South American context than the African context, a third, usually much smaller group of young people, move to the rural areas because they are disappointed with the city life, longing for rural environments, nature, space, a healthier environment and a meaningful work. Most of them are well educated, have an idea of life and may be very unexperienced concerning rural life. Very often their initial enthusiasm

may collapse after some time and they are returning to the cities. However, some cases have shown that it is exactly this group of people who prove to be immensely creative and persistent, thus providing great examples of how to create a successful rural existence (issue to be discussed further).

Initiatives that focus on young rural people should seek to address all three groups according to their specific needs of knowledge, practical skills, experiences of successful entrepreneurial activity and accompaniment. While the first group usually requires a lot of basic knowledge, education and training, the second group needs accompaniment in elaborating ways to harness their gained experiences best in the back-home environment. The third group, if existing in a given context, should be supported in harnessing their knowledge by adapting their ideas to the rural contexts.

- **Address specific needs of rural women**

All of the above approaches hold true for rural women as they do for rural men. However, given the historic gender gap in rural areas, additional efforts are required to sustainably improve the situation of rural women (ILO, 2018).

1. Traditional gender rules and discriminatory legislation must be overcome in order to provide equal access to and control over productive resources (e.g., land, agricultural machinery, education and financial services). As this involves changing attitudes and behaviour (e.g., sharing childcare and household chores between men and women), it is a complex change process.
2. Ensure economic empowerment of rural women (including minimum wage) – of course, this applies to rural men as well.
3. Ensure greater voice and representation of women within decision-making structures and leadership. This goes hand in hand with their education and skills development so that they can meaningfully fulfil these roles.
4. Explore and establish alternatives to agricultural wage labour for women that better suits their needs (e.g., flexible working hours to be able to work and raise children). Alternatives can include businesses and entrepreneurship.
5. Enhance access to social finance for women (i.e., ensure that financial institutions adopt a gender responsive strategy).
6. Effectively prevent and address gender-based violence and harassment in both, workplaces and homes.

- **Strengthen youth presence in decision making processes**

Political representation and the demographic pyramid all over the world are in sharp contrast to the overwhelming majority of young people being governed by adult and mostly elderly men. Moreover, most of the local political systems at communal level have no or little institutionalised ways for the interests of young people to be considered within decision making. On international level, this phenomenon and the response to it can presently be seen by the “Fridays for Future” movement (Honwana2014: 33). However, this is only a small part of the bigger picture of under-representation of young people on all levels of public decision making. Therefore, mechanisms have to be worked out⁷ and put into place that guarantee a fair share of responsibility of young people in the determination of the future of their immediate local and regional environments. One approach is to facilitate integration of young people into self-government structures especially on local communal level. A more indirect approach to promote participation is to form consultative rural youth committees which come together on specific themes, elaborating proposals which are ultimately fed into local/ communal decision-making processes. However, there is the danger of a

⁷ Possibly in participatory processes

predominance of adult experts and policy makers who determine the themes and the procedures. Thus, it is necessary to ensure that the consultative processes are driven by the youth themselves rather than outsiders, while at the same time keeping an eye on the risks, such as creating unrealistic expectations among young people and the subsequent disillusion and frustration if expectations remain unfulfilled.

Specific approaches for improving life perspectives and employment of youth in the rural context:

- **Modernise agriculture jointly with young people, transforming it into a knowledge-based activity and thus making it attractive**

For many of today's smallholder-communities, agriculture consists essentially of a mixture of indigenous practices coupled with inputs of agro-chemistry. Value addition is rare, most small holders are selling raw-materials to the processing industries. As a matter of fact, this practice very often leads to a vicious cycle of deterioration and exhaustion of soils, poor productive systems and very low income. Many youths do not see a perspective for themselves in this type of instable and low-income livelihood. In order to counteract this development and making agriculture attractive for youth, a boost is needed in terms of agricultural skills development as well as entrepreneurial competencies. Acquisition of practical knowledge can build on an indigenous knowledge-base, but it must be coupled with the know-how of a sustainable, climate-change adaptive agriculture, and with entrepreneurship development. Modern agricultural skills training is based on the logic of value chains and comprised of modules which a learner can select according to interest, income and work opportunities. Obtaining a certificate of competence does not bring you a job, but it raises the self-esteem of the learner, and it can provide avenues to jobs in agro-industries. Entrepreneurship training for young farmers should not follow a standard "starting your own business" format but must be adaptive to the agricultural context and embedded into practical action, e.g. through small-scale business projects, implemented by the learners themselves during the course of training. Talking about practical knowledge in agriculture means firstly to make basic mechanisms of growing and production within the given local and natural framework understood. Secondly, it means that this knowledge must not be recipes but provide a good understanding of systemic causes and consequences. This understanding of practical knowledge implies that the learning process to acquire this knowledge must be practices-related with teachers/trainers who explain, help to implement, accompany and guide reflection phases. This kind of modernisation of agricultural practice does not stop with production, but as well needs to involve processing as well as local and regional marketing. Needless to say, the adequate and sensible use of all provided possibilities of modern communication for this process is key⁸.

- **Create opportunities for non-agricultural incomes and jobs**

Agriculture cannot absorb a fast-growing young rural population. While decent jobs in formal sector businesses and in the public sector are out of reach for most rural youth, the remaining option is informal self- or wage employment in the informal economy. Rural youth face more obstacles to acquire skills for work and income outside agriculture than their urban counterparts. Vocational training centres are often far from home, meaning that costs for training (tuition, transport, housing) are too high for rural families. Many rural youths, especially women, do not fulfil the entry requirement to enrol in formal training institutions. Furthermore, opportunities for informal apprenticeship and other forms of work-based learning are often not existing in villages. Measures for improving rural youths' access to quality skills training include mobile training programmes, training vouchers and scholarships, and facilitation of placements to quality apprenticeship. As argued above, the development of young people's entrepreneurial competencies is as important as

⁸ Besides the potential improvements that structural transformation can lead to, efforts should also be undertaken to enhance agricultural productivity by, for instance, upgrading the skills of members of rural households, and also through initiatives such as the development of agricultural value chains. With this aim in mind, the ILO is actively supporting the promotion of decent work opportunities within the agricultural sector (ILO World Employment Social Outlook, 2019)

vocational skills training. More opportunities arise in the provision of services, including digital services, from which rural youth can benefit, as long as they get the opportunity to learn the needed skills and practice them. Examples are digital learning, market information platforms, business promotion, mechanisation services and others. It is essential, however, to choose and adapt training methods and tools according to the specific education and skill levels. Rural hubs are a viable approach to provide a basis for skills acquisition and learning business practices. Furthermore, it is necessary to create and facilitate rural-urban business linkages, as the example of the Tamale business hub in Ghana shows. It should be noted however, that the innovation hubs often cater for “high-fliers” among the youth generation, i.e. those with a university degree and with good access to business networks. Rural youth, even if they had secondary schooling, often face “class-barriers” that prevent them accessing and utilising the hubs.

- **Access to financial services and start-up capital**

Community-based financial services (e.g., savings groups, village savings and loan associations (VSLA)) provide rural youth, in particular rural women, with a secure way to save money and access loans. As there is no outside capital needed, it is easy to access. In addition, VSLA are often associated with alphabetisation and numeracy classes which form a prerequisite for other undertakings. NGOs have established hundreds of thousands of savings groups in rural areas since the early 1990s. As the groups rely on group discipline and self-management, they offer women an opportunity to take on responsibilities and leadership outside the household. If they are well implemented, savings groups also offer women training on financial literacy, book keeping etc., i.e., offering essential business skills that they can apply.

Increasingly, savings groups (also referred to as informal financial services) now link up with formal financial services (i.e., banks and loan providers). While individual women have been denied these services due to lack of collateral, the savings group provides sufficient security. As a result, rural women find it easier to get bank accounts and access loans from formal financial service providers – which is essential for setting up a business and investing in agricultural production. Specific savings groups for youth have been on the rise as well.

Yet, the access of young entrepreneurs/ start-ups to financial services remains a key challenge. Saving and lending through traditional VSLAs is a process that takes too long for starting a business and the volume of loans is often too low for realising a business idea. For micro finance institutions, business starters are a high-risk group. One mechanism is start-up competitions that provide capital to the most convincing business ideas, often linked to a process of business idea creation and business incubation. The direct reach of this measure might however be limited (cf. example of Ghana above).

- **Provide decentralized employment services locally and in a mobile manner**

In many countries, employment services (e.g., job centres, career guidance, support with job searches) are centralized in urban centres. Several programmes focusing on improving employment services for rural youth (e.g., the GIZ You Match Initiative) have supported existing innovative approaches such as mobile employment services which move between several rural locations to meet the needs of young job seekers where they live. Decentralization of employment services by creating local employment / career centres is another good example. This approach can also decentralize responsibilities and decision-making power to local actors (public, private and civil society).

- **Provide guidance and accompaniment rather than recipes**

Schools and vocational training institutions usually make efforts of passing over relevant theoretical and technical knowledge to their students and trainees. Doing this in a serious, targeted and reflected manner definitely is a very important pillar for any economic existence. However, it seems not to be enough to really motivate students to take responsibility for themselves and to apply the transferred knowledge to develop perspectives for their life. The cited student projects in Serbia as

well as the so-called incubation programmes in Ghana show that another step towards application is necessary. The initiation of this step is the untapping of young people's dreams and ideas, which in turn need to take over the lead in a very concrete learning process. Tools for transforming and concretising these motivations are workshops that help to reap ideas and dreams of young people into concrete and realistic plans, provide them with the tailor-made knowledge (or skills to research it!) and encourage them to put them into practice. A further step may consist in regular or on-demand coaching or mentoring support for the implementation of own projects.

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