

A VIABLE FUTURE: ATTRACTING THE YOUTH TO AGRICULTURE



ISSUE PAPER
ASK. ANALYZE. ADVOCATE. ACT!



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Youth is often the time when a person starts to dream of the future, think of the path to take and boldly and aggressively set his/her life in motion. In many rural villages, to be a farmer is not part of this dreamt future. Farming is a lowly job and does not earn, so better migrate to cities or abroad where there may be more opportunities and adventure. What will then be the future of agriculture and food without young farmers? No farmer, no food. No food, no life.

In this issue paper, we will discuss why young people are not attracted to agriculture, what are the initiatives being taken to encourage the youth to be in agriculture, and what are the recommendations for the youth to stay in it. The discussions here is a consolidation of (a) the results of the national consultations and participatory researches conducted by AFA members in 9 countries involving around 660 rural youth on the issue “attracting the youth to agriculture” using the Farmers Advocacy Consultation Tool (FACT) developed by Agriterria; (b) the results of the regional consultation involving 30 men and 10 women representatives, from 17 national farmer organizations in 13 countries held last May 2014 and (c) desk research and literature review. AFA conducted these consultations during the celebration of the International Year of Family Farming (IYFF), since youth in agriculture is one of its IYFF priority issues



WHO ARE THE YOUTH?

The current generation of youth, defined by the United Nations as those aged 15 to 24, is the largest in history. As of 2012, the youth make up 1.8 billion or 18% of total world population. Ninety percent (90%) of these young people live in developing countries, comprising as much as 20% of their countries' total population.

UN ESCAP (2012) data show that 750 million, or over 60% of the world's youth, live in the Asia-Pacific region. In 2010, India registered the highest number of young people in the world at 234 million, or 19% of the country's total population. China registered the second highest at 225 million, or 17% of its total population. Bangladesh and the Philippines had young people constituting 20% of their total populations. Japan had 12 million young people or 10% of its total population.

Many countries have their own age definition of youth, depending on specific socio-cultural, institutional, economic and social factors. Youth is defined under the law as young men and women, 12-24 years old in Taiwan 14-28 in Kyrgyzstan; 15-25 in Thailand; 15/16-30 in the Philippines, Cambodia /Indonesia, Vietnam; 15-34 in Mongolia; 15-40 in Nepal and Myanmar; 18-35 in Bangladesh; 9-24 in South Korea and 0-30 in Japan.

THE YOUTH IN RURAL AREAS

Up to 70 percent of the youth in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia live in rural areas, and over half of those in the labor force engage in agriculture.¹

For many decades, the rural youth have been under-tapped and neglected by their communities, governments, and international organizations, and thus are unable to make full use of their energy and potentials in the agriculture sector. The rural youth is often unemployed or work informally in unpaid or underpaid, low skilled, insecure and hazardous jobs. The lack of opportunities and decent jobs in the rural areas compel the youth to migrate to cities. Sons and daughters of farmers are often reluctant to go into farming due to various reasons. Many of those who continue to stay in the farms were often forced or did not have better options. This has resulted to another problem: ageing of the farming population. If the youth is the future of the nation, and the rural youth is the future of

¹ http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_182750.pdf



agriculture and rural industry, how can we then attract the youth to stay or work in the rural areas? What kind of policies and programs are needed to make them see that a good future awaits them and then decide to stay, by choice, in agriculture and rural industry?

WHY AGRICULTURE IS NOT ATTRACTIVE TO THE YOUTH

From the results of national and regional consultations among youth leaders of AFA member organizations as well as from literature review, we can state seven (7) interrelated reasons why many of the youth, even the sons and daughters of farming families, will not farm, if given a choice:

- 1. Farmers' low identity and self-image.** Farming is regarded as a lowly, back-breaking, unglamorous, dirty job needing little skills. There is usually less pride and dignity in farming. This low regard for farming is reinforced in society. Farmers tell their children: “Do not be like me, just a lowly farmer.” “If you don't study well, you will just end up here, farming”. “You are not a bright student, go back to the field and just plant sweet potato.” Many schoolchildren dream to be doctors, engineers or lawyers, but seldom to be farmers. Agricultural producers and peasants are always ranked low in developing countries and are defined as uneducated or uncivilized (Shrestha, 2001:114-115).
- 2. Farming is not a profitable job.** Majority of farmers are poor. They do not gain enough income from agriculture and are far from meeting their family, even personal, needs. Decreasing incomes due to increasing cost of agricultural labor and inputs, such as seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides, low prices of produce, lack of control over their markets and high risks in agriculture brought by unpredictable weather conditions and price fluctuations keep the youth away from agriculture. Subsistence-oriented farming discourages young people, to engage in agriculture. Seeing family consumption as the only benefit of farming, the youth do not see any future prospects in farming.
- 3. Insecure land ownership and increasing land price.** Since 1990, the global context of land reform has transformed small-scale farming to large-scale farming and market-led land reform (Borras, 2006: 99) Special economic zones of all sorts of privatization for the process of urbanization treat land as a commodity to be freely bought and sold in the market place (Kumar, 2011). Due to market-oriented land and agrarian reform, the price of land increases. Peasant culture and peasants are not independent from the framework of the ruling class. Land banking promotes land markets and the removal of peasants from the land. It has become a tool to control land and make it a commodity determining who can

buy, sell and make profit (Hu, Yeh, Wu, 2009). Those who cultivate the land are deprived of ownership; those who own land do not cultivate. Seizing land from farmers and handing this over to private owners, especially land plotters or industrialists, escalate the youth de-peasantization (Kumar, 2011). Current reforms are focused on modernization of agriculture rather than on distribution of land and tenure security of tillers, including young farmers.

4. **Lack of rural infrastructure.** The base of agriculture remains in the rural areas. There is, however, a lack of good infrastructure and institutions to attract the youth to stay in the rural areas. In developing countries, most rural areas do not have good access to roads, electricity, health centers, clinics and hospitals, schools and universities, entertainment and amusement parks, internet connections, business establishments, markets to sell their agricultural produce as well as facilities for small and medium scale agro-industries or factories.
5. **Lack of supportive government policies and programs for family farmers.** Many governments in developing countries give priority to corporate farming rather than family farming. Thus, the agriculture policies and programs in developing countries are not completely supportive of family farmers, in spite of the fact that they comprise the majority of farmers in the country and in the Asian region as a whole. Thus, many farmers still lack land, credit/financing, and markets. Formal credit

system and commercial banks supported commercial farming, destroyed peasant economy and family farming, and established a market economy (Harvey, 2003:156-166). The price of agricultural products is controlled by the market, not by the peasant or state. There is lack of transparency in price-setting, trade agreement, and policy formulation (Ahmad et al, 2010:37). The farmers are not represented, and therefore have little or no voice, in key decision-making processes on agriculture matters. Even so, there is lack of policies and programs addressing the needs of the rural youth or of young farmers; initiatives and incentives have remained scarce if not totally absent for them. Without these needed support, the young farmers feel that they cannot compete with big commercial farmers.

6. **Lack of curriculum on land, agrarian reform and agriculture.** Agriculture is the major source of employment in many developing countries. School and university curricula in these countries, however, do not include land and agriculture, resulting in the neglect of land and agrarian reform, thus discouraging young farmers to pursue an agricultural career.
7. **Lack of organizations of young farmers.** At local, national and international levels, there are very few organized groups of young farmers for solidarity, exchange of information and ideas, for supporting each other's endeavors and for representing their interests in decision-making bodies.



CHALLENGES FACED BY YOUNG FARMERS

The youth who are engaged in farming face many challenges as young farmers, among which are:

1. **Lack of access to and control over productive resources (land, capital) and markets.** First, there is no land and agrarian reform focusing on young farmers in many Asian countries. As a result, most young farmers do not have access to lands for commercialization of their traditional farming (Wobst, 2010). They are landless, and often perform seasonal agriculture labor. Second, many young farmers have to wait until they inherit the land from their parents. While they still work under their parents' wings, they have little decision over farming matters. Third, there are almost no banks and financial institutions that serve the agricultural sector and if there are, their understanding of the needs of young entrepreneur farmers is weak. Fourth, many young farmers have not yet established their markets.
2. **Inadequate skills and knowledge on production, processing, and business.** The current generation of young farmers has limited agricultural knowledge and skills as well as leadership and managerial skills (IIED, 2012:31). Skills development and technology transfer are considered the key to 'model youth farming'. However, these have not been incorporated in government programs and school curricula. The youth prefer new technologies but many institutions do not understand their aspirations. Consequently, due to a lack of encouragement, support and promotion of adequate knowledge and skills especially in technology and modernization of farming, young farmers do not see any future in agriculture (Wobst, 2010).
3. **Globalization, uncertainties, and variability in prices.** In some Asian countries, due to low tariff or open system for agriculture products, young farmers cannot compete with their products and are compelled to leave their farms. Instability in agricultural price is another factor. Due to low or no tariff in agriculture products, foreign products seem cheaper, making local products look expensive. People prefer cheaper goods to expensive ones. Due to various free trade agreements (FTAs) some smallholders suffer loss, compelling them to leave the agricultural occupation.



INITIATIVES TO ATTRACT THE YOUTH INTO FARMING

1. **Capacity building and leadership development.** In the last five years, in response to the global food crisis, AFA members and partners, CSOs, governments and UN agencies commenced capacity building and leadership development of farmers and farmers' organizations with special focus on the rural youth. In some countries, farmers' fora were formed through which capacity building and leadership development programs were conducted. Farmers' exchange programs to build the knowledge of farmers have also been conducted.

Box 1: Young organic farmers in Japan

In Japan, six new young organic farmers had an average gross profit of 8,860, thousand yen in 2013, an increase by 207%. They attributed their success to the sufficient support – skills, land, house, and markets - given to them by their farmer-trainers. The new young farmers acquired their agricultural skills through: training by fellow senior farmers, farmers in the nearby region, government extension providers; participation in training courses; reading books; and internet. They became independent within a short period, after which they trained other newcomers. Also, they strengthened cooperation and became increasingly organized with the support of three major organic agricultural groups. They got their customers in three main ways: referrals (by senior farmers, shippers groups, and friends), self-seeking, and internet.

2. **Debate on family farming.** The influx of multinational companies, land grabbing, and corporate farming led to an increased debate on family farming and peasant economy. The UN celebrated the International Year of Family Farming in 2014 and most FOs, CSOs and

government agencies supported this. FOs and CSOs working on agriculture and food started debating and influencing policy on family farming, sustainable, agro-ecological approaches and increasing market power of family farmers. The focus on family farming has contributed to a special attention to youth in agriculture.

Box 2: New Farmer Program, Tainan City, Taiwan

Currently enrolled in the program are 268 young farmers (14% women), all under 45 years of age, currently farmers or aspiring to be farmers. The government extension unit provides technical and financial support to these young farmers. Technical support is provided through experts, apprenticeship, agriculture courses, and counseling system. The agriculture experts and masters who teach agriculture to young farmers are deployed through the district farmers' associations. Financial support comes in the form of government loans with low interest to young farmers to buy facilities, supplies or equipment. Several new farmers were successful, became young millionaire farmers, and won competitions such as in organic rice and organic cherry tomato production.



3. **Development of sustainable, agro-ecological, organic farming.** People started to prefer organic food towards a healthy lifestyle. As a result, the number of organic farms has increased. The positive aspect of this scenario is that mostly the youth are involved in the promotion of organic farm, and their interest is increasing. For them, organic farming provides some meaning in their work, more opportunities to do innovation and learn from old and new ways of farming. Some governments have provided support to promote sustainable, agro-ecological and organic farming, thus attracting more youth in agriculture. In South Asia, returning migrants from the Gulf started farming and some of them are promoting organic farming as well.

Box 3: Ana Sibayan

Ana, 24 years old, is a daughter of a farming couple, from Mindoro Oriental, Philippines. She has finished a commercial cooking course, but she loved farming and wanted to have her own farm and manage her own farm business. She attended a training on Integrated, Diversified Organic Farming Systems (IDOFS), given by PAKISAMA, a national farmer organization in the Philippines. After her training on IDOFS in 2014, Ana convinced her family to convert their 2,500 square-meter farm into an IDOFS farm. She started to build a vermi-compost, a fishpond, a vegetable garden, and raise free range chickens. She made optimum use of every square-meter of their family farm. She is now promoting IDOFS farm planning to other young farmers in their neighborhood and beyond. She was awarded as one of the model farmers during the Philippine celebration of the International Year of Family Farming (IYFF).

4. **Building FOs.** CSOs and even UN agencies have been facilitating the process of forming FOs, mobilizing them for policy change and farming. Farmer organizations have started to form their youth wing. Debates and discussions have focused on farmers' rights and initiatives.

Box 4: Youth organizations in Mongolia

In Mongolia, several NGOs work on youth issues such as the Mongolian Youth Federation (MYF), the largest NGO in Mongolia. It aims to be a voice for youth advancement and rights protection. The Mongolian Young Herders Committee was established in 2013 to protect the interests of young herders. It organized a national consultation in February 2014 attended by youth herders across Mongolia's 21 provinces. The Committee has been working on a national level survey questionnaire about young herders. The Young Cooperators Club was established in 2010 and successfully organized the First Meeting of Cooperative Young Leadership in Agriculture in 2013.

5. **Promotion of women farmers.** As more and more rural men migrate to cities and abroad, agriculture has become feminized and debates on women farmers' rights and access to land have begun. Women farmers have been actively involved in advocating for their rights. In some countries, including Nepal, women farmers' forums have been formed.

Box 5: Youth committee in Cambodia

In Cambodia, the Farmer and Nature Net (FNN) has established a youth committee which is represented in its board. The young farmers are also being developed into young leaders and farmer entrepreneurs through exposure to demonstration farms and good farming practices such as building a fish pond, growing organic rice, applying multipurpose farming, raising livestock, and using manure to produce biogas.



6. **Evidence-based advocacy on comprehensive policy for family farmers.** Farmers organizations in countries such as in Indonesia, the Philippines, Nepal, and India have been organizing a series of debates and discussions on comprehensive land and agrarian reform policies, including on land ownership, access to agricultural inputs, devolution of land administration, and formulation and implementation of land use and farmers' rights policy. FOs and CSOs have been actively involved in these activities. Farmers have been mobilizing themselves

in advocating for policy change on land and agrarian reform on behalf of young farmers. Some FOs, CSOs and UN agencies in countries such as Nepal, Mongolia, Cambodia, the Philippines, Indonesia, Bangladesh, and Vietnam, have been conducting research and case documentations for policy advocacy for young farmers. They use the research findings and cases to influence their respective governments and policy makers. Gradually, INGOs and bilateral organizations have been moving towards supporting young farmers and investing in agriculture.

Box 6: Young farmers in Korea

According to the The Korean Advanced Farmers' Federation (KAFF) and the Women Advanced Farmers Federation (WAFF), although there are many problems in the agricultural sector, there is hope. As a response to the growing problem of corporate take-over of farmlands, the government has regulated ownership of land such that only those who have been farming for five years are allowed to own lands in rural areas. To address the needs of farmers affected by FTAs, the government has developed a policy to ensure that industries which gain from FTAs support agriculture through a fund that allows these industries to invest their profit in agriculture. More recently, Korean rice farmers have been able to negotiate that all losses

that they would incur due to FTAs would be compensated by government. It is deemed the duty of government to ensure the survival of Korean farmers. KAFF has proposed a policy that will: (1) ensure succession in family farms by providing endowment, technological support and education to promote better ecosystem of farmers; (2) exempt young farmers from military service; (3) provide financial support to young farmers by lowering interest rates from the current 3% to 1% and adopting a credential recognition system; (4) enable members of Youth Farmers Association to actively participate in KAFF activities; and (5) maximize social responsibility of young farmers and develop their capacity as local farming leaders.

WHAT CAN OUR GOVERNMENTS DO TO ATTRACT THE YOUTH TO AGRICULTURE AND MAKE THEM STAY?

Based on our interviews and observations with the rural youth, our reflection is that the youth can be attracted to agriculture if: (1) agriculture will earn enough for them to raise a family, (2) they are provided basic resources such as land, capital, training, farm equipment and market and (3) they can see meaning and significance in their agriculture work.

If taken, the following recommendations or action points will allow young farmers to help propel their respective countries to become self-reliant on food, and contribute to sustainable and inclusive growth. These recommendations have also been inspired by the successful initiatives mentioned above.

1. Provide young farmers with ownership or use or lease rights of farming lands for at least 25 years. Without long-term land security, youth will not be interested in farming in their respective villages.
2. Provide special and integrated agricultural programs and support services to young farmers, including education, training and extension, leadership training, credit, technologies, agricultural inputs, appropriate equipment and machineries, subsidies, insurance, and markets. School curricula should encourage agriculture as a profession. Young farmers can be trained as young rural entrepreneurs, focusing on sustainable, agro-

ecology based production and processing and setting up of agriculture multi-purpose cooperatives; as these provide added meaning and cultivate idealism in their lives. Provide public recognition to outstanding young farmers, e.g those who were able to successfully help in building agriculture cooperatives. Young women farmers should also be given special focus as often in the rural areas they are more marginalized by existing social structures and practices, yet have the potential.

3. Provide avenues wherein young farmers can organize themselves, learn from each other and participate in decision-making and policy formulation processes. Young people need to feel a sense of ownership of policies and programs concerning them. Conduct exchange and knowledge visits among young farmers intra and inter-country. Set up information centers for the youth.
4. Improve infrastructure and peace and order situation in rural areas, as well as provide social security and protection for young farmers.
5. Farmers in the Asia Pacific region are family farmers, who are the poorest and hungriest in the world. Supporting the family farmers now through a comprehensive and integrated policy and program on agrarian reform, rural development, sustainable, agro-ecological approaches, and markets and trade will increase incomes and resilience of farmers, thereby changing young peoples' views about farming.



WHAT CAN AFA DO TO PROMOTE AGRICULTURE AMONG THE YOUNG?

- 1. Policy advocacy.** Most Asian farmers are concerned about policy issues. AFA can facilitate for common regional issues, such as on neo-liberal policy, WTO in agriculture, climate change, free trade, land grabbing, rights of young and women farmers, social security, and others. AFA regional farmers' associations can lobby with UN agencies and bilateral organizations on farmer-friendly policies, programs, and support.
- 2. Alliance building among FOs.** Land and agricultural issues are political issues; they can only be solved through political means. Therefore, it is important to engage concerned governments through community mobilizations at the national and international levels. In this regard, AFA can facilitate the process of alliance building among FOs and CSOs towards such mobilizations.
- 3. Young farmer exchange programs.** AFA members and other FOs have developed sustainable agricultural models. AFA can facilitate the process of young farmers' exchange programs; knowledge building of farmers on agriculture farming, new technology, new policy formulation; and attracting the youth in agriculture.
- 4. Partnership among FOs.** Sustaining family farming and youth in agriculture is not possible without financial and technical support. Thus, AFA can facilitate the process of partnership among more sustainable FOs with CSOs working in the field of agriculture and donors supporting and promoting agriculture in different regions and countries.
- 5. Research and publication.** Research and publication on agricultural, family or youth farming is an important area. A number of issues require study and dialogue with respective governments or donor agencies. AFA can directly conduct research and dialogue at the regional level and provide support on these at the country level.

CONCLUSION

Around sixty percent of the world's youth, or 750 million, live in the Asia Pacific region. Up to 70% of them, or around 525 million, are living in the rural areas of the continent, with more than half of them directly engaged in agriculture. However, many rural youth prefer to migrate to cities or work abroad. Many of those who stayed did not have better options. They see that farming does not earn, that it is a lowly and high risk job, and is poorly supported by government and other institutions.

However, the youth can be attracted to agriculture if: (1) agriculture will earn enough for them to raise a family, (2) they are provided basic resources such as land, capital, training,

farm equipment and market, and (3) they can see meaning and significance in their work.

To harness the potentials and energy of the youth for agriculture, a comprehensive and integrated policy and program on agrarian reform, rural development, sustainable, agro-ecological production and farmer-managed agro-based enterprises as well as on markets and trade should be put in place, with special incentives and provisions for young farmers, especially women.

The youth is the future of the nation, and the rural youth is the future of agriculture and rural industry. The time to act is now, if we would like to have farmers, and food, in the future.



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