

# TOWARDS ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT, PARTICIPATION AND AGROECOLOGY

*A Rural Youth Situationer  
from Six Countries in Asia*



## INTRODUCTION

Young people are regarded as the drivers of a better future for societies. And rural youth represent the future of agriculture and sustainable farming systems now increasingly being acknowledged as key to solving some of the leading world challenges like food insecurity, livelihood dislocation, environmental destruction and widespread poverty. But the youth are losing hope in rural livelihood and agriculture is losing this vast and productive resource.

In 2019, one in six persons in the world belongs to the youth, aged 15-24, totaling over 1.2 billion or around 16% of the global population. In the same year, the largest number of youth totaling 361 million came from Central and Southern Asia, followed by Eastern and Southeast Asia with 307 million youth (UN DESA). In 2015 India has the largest population of youth than in any country in the world numbering 242 million. The Philippines and Bangladesh had young people comprising around 20% of their country's population. (UN WPP, 2015)

While a vast majority of the world's youth are found in Asia (UNFPA 2014), the number is expected to decline from 718 to 711 million by 2030. Still, the region is expected to be home to the highest number of youth in the world (OECD). Except for China, the majority of young people in Asia still live in the rural areas.

World poverty is highest in the rural areas where the enormous majority of the population from developing countries live. According to UN-International Fund for Agricultural Development (UN-IFAD), an estimated 3 billion people make up the rural population of these countries or 40% of the world's people. They work the fields and feed their nations yet 80% of women, children and men living in rural communities suffer extreme poverty. A 2018 World Bank report showed 783 million people were extremely poor who live below the poverty line of USD 1.9 a day. Of this figure, around 33% live in South Asia and 9% live in East Asia and the Pacific (World Vision).

Developing countries, mostly found in Asia, account for 90% of the world's youth and around half of them can be found in the rural areas. (FAO-ILO). While rural youth are increasingly engaged in non-farm economic activities in many countries of the Global South, a Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) world map of agricultural production showed a huge proportion of the population still depends on farming in Sub-Saharan Africa, South and East Asia (van der Geest 2010).

Despite narratives of structural and rural transformation which frame rural youth futures away from farm production, agriculture is still the biggest employer of youth in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Nepal and Vietnam from an ILO Survey data in 2013 (Briones 2019). The same is still true for India (Som et al. 2018). Small-scale farming remains to be the biggest adult and youth employment source in Low- and Middle-income countries. It accounts for 35% of all employment in Asia and covers an even higher share of rural employment (White, 2019).

### A future in agriculture?

Rural youth aspirations reflect a despondency to agriculture. They are discouraged to pursue farm work citing low productivity, decreasing income and hopelessness in subsistence farming that barely meet family needs (Deotti and Estruch, 2016; AFA, 2016). Dissatisfaction is widespread





especially among youth in subsistence work from developing countries. Majority expressed desire to change their current agricultural livelihood, wanting better pay and improved working conditions (OECD, 2018). They prefer to land jobs in the formal employment sector even as the amenities of modern urban lifestyle appeal to them (Leavy and Hossain, 2014).

Lack of access to land, capital and other productive resources (Ibid), including inadequate rural infrastructure and state prioritization to small farmers (AFA, 2016) dissuade many young people from considering a future in farming. These challenges prevent them from seeing a stable future in farming or farm-related work as they find it extremely difficult to decently support their families. This privation further aggravate the discouragement of rural youth who view agriculture as work that is menial, grueling, very unrewarding and of low social status (Leavy and Smith, 2010).

Still, rural youth aspiration studies reveal that many young people do not reject agriculture per se but it is the crisis condition of agriculture, especially the problem of land access and the exceedingly bleak prospect of having decent livelihood that are forcing them to abandon farming. Moreover, the push to find better opportunities outside farming and farm-related work does not necessarily mean permanent withdrawal from agriculture. Many youth assert better support, access to land and technology and improved income could make agriculture attractive to young people (White, 2019).

### **Rural youth migration**

Unemployment, underemployment, low productivity, unstable earnings, indebtedness and worsening conditions of poverty characterize the lives of youth in rural communities. The result is a growing global phenomenon of distress migration where young people are forced to leave households and their communities of origin, seeing it as the “only viable livelihood option” to address their poverty. Climate change, environmental degradation and political conflict also spawn conditions that drive people to migrate (Deotti and Estruch, 2016; FAO, 2016).

Around the world, rural areas are the source of the bulk of migrants and the youth are immensely affected by it. In 2015, more than 30% of the almost 250 million international migrants are aged 15-34 and women comprise almost half of them (FAO, 2016).

In Southeast Asia, there is a growing trend of internal migration characterized greatly by rural-to-urban transfer of young people who tend to move during their 20s. There are more males involved in rural-to-rural, seasonal movement who tend to work in construction, agriculture and heavy manufacturing or as taxi drivers. On the other hand, more females are pulled to long term, rural-to-urban migration where they land jobs in light manufacturing, garments, domestic help and other service employment (UNESCO Bangkok, 2018).

Young people are also drawn to outmigration because they aspire for more education, training and other services for social protection that are usually limited in rural areas. They believe better education offers greater potential for more skilled, formal and high-income occupations. Rural youth who have acquired higher levels of education are similarly more inclined to be mobile (de Brauw, 2019). But the reality of the labor market creates an aspiration-achievement gap where the more stable jobs they seek are not attained and they fall back to farm work (White, 2019).

## Young women farmers

Longstanding poverty, marginalization and social inequalities place additional burdens to young rural women compared to their male and adult counterparts. On top of working the fields, they are expected to perform other laborious tasks like gathering firewood and water. Household care responsibilities and traditional attitudes on education deny them more time to study, gain training or find other income-generating activities. Developing self-sufficient livelihood remains to be a far cry with young women usually involved in unpaid family work or low-pay seasonal, part-time work. Cultural norms favor men in terms of land inheritance while women constitute only 20% of all landholders in the world. This, despite the fact that women comprise almost half of the agricultural labor force and more than half of the world's food are produced by women (FAO, 2020; SOFA Team and Doss, 2011; ARWC, 2020).

## Knowledge and voice

There is insufficient access to knowledge, information and education which limits productivity, the acquisition of enhanced skills and capacities, and hinders prospects for local entrepreneurial ventures. The lack of agricultural education also pertains to inadequate knowledge on sustainable, agroecological farming including traditional farming systems that are actually increasingly recognized as viable solutions to food shortage and climate change impacts.

Youth participation and voice to address agricultural problems are very limited due to a lack of rural youth organizations (AFA, 2016). This hinders opportunities for solidarity and meaningful, productive exchange among them which can strengthen agency. Hence, they are not effectively represented in decision-making processes even though they offer great potential in transforming agriculture.

## Industrial agriculture

Several challenges confront farmers in general, like lack of access to land, insecure ownership of land and control of productive resources, aggravated by insufficient or absent state support. Market-led agrarian reform and land use conversions have transformed small holder farms in villages into large-scale plantations, special economic zones for export-import industries, and other privatized land investments geared to urbanization, resulting to land dispossession of millions of farmers.

Many governments of developing countries have favored industrial agriculture over small farmers which stemmed decades of hazardous chemical farming, the enactment of state policies detrimental to livelihoods and food security, and the lack of support for infrastructure, funding prioritization and farmer-led rural development programming. All these have discouraged the youth to look at farming and agriculture as a viable economic opportunity.

## **Impacts of states' push for market-led industrial agriculture**

### **Vietnam**

*Between 2001 and 2005, a total of 366,000 ha of agricultural land, or 73,000 ha per year, was lost to non-agricultural use in two of the country's most important 'rice bowls' - the Red River Delta and Southeast regions. Industrial zones set up in both regions displaced hundreds of thousands of farming families even as food security can no longer be guaranteed for about one third of these regions' land area. (Jingzhong and Lu, 2016)*

### **India**

*The modernization of agriculture ushered by the Green Revolution since the 1960s resulted in the growth of food grains production but introduced high-yield varieties that require intensive use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Absent land reform, the new technologies burdened small farmers with mounting debt from higher cost of inputs; intensified regional imbalances in terms of income and productivity as technologies favored richly endowed irrigated regions; and battered the environment with pollution and large-scale loss of biodiversity (Halim, 2013). A 2014 study (Kennedy and King) concluded that Indian farmers most vulnerable to the phenomenon of peasant suicides were those involved in cash-crop production, owning very small land and heavily indebted.*

### **Philippines**

*After implementing neoliberal reforms in agriculture since the 1980s, the Philippines became a net food importing country in 1995 coinciding its entry as an original member of the World Trade Organization. (Tujan, 2013) A decade hence, the country became a top global importer of rice and despite being the 8<sup>th</sup> largest rice producing country in 2008 according to the World Rice Statistics and Food and Agriculture Organization. This dependency on rice importation has taken a turn for the worse after government's implementation of the Rice Tariffication Act of 2019. Hundreds of thousands farmers are feared to lose their livelihoods because they will not be able to compete with cheaper subsidized imports. (Africa, 2019)*



## RURAL YOUTH PERSPECTIVES

This Rural Youth Situationer is a product of a survey conducted by the PAN Asia Pacific (PANAP) between 2018 and 2019 among rural youth in Asia in cooperation with six partner organisations.

In Bangladesh, BARCIK (*Bangladesh Resource Center for Indigenous Knowledge*) carried out the survey in the Shyamnaga sub-district under Shatkira District from the southwestern coastal region, as well as in the northeast at Kalmakanda sub-district under the Netrakona District. In the Philippines, MASIPAG (*Farmer-Scientist Partnership for Development*) surveyed youth from the Calinan district north of Davao and UMA (*Unyon ng mga Manggagawa sa Agrikultura/ Federation of Agricultural Workers*) did the survey in the provinces of Batangas, Negros, Bicol as well as among indigenous youth displaced by militarization in Mindanao. While KUDUMBAM conducted interviews in Pudukkottai district of Tamil Nadu, India; PACOS Trust in Sabah, Malaysia; VIKALPANI National Women's Federation in Moneregala district, Sri Lanka; and CGFED (*Research Center for Gender, Family and Environment in Development*) in Hanoi, Vietnam.

The survey gathered the insights and perspectives of a total 142 young farmers, including agriculture students in the six countries through self-administered questionnaires, key informant interviews and focus group discussions. The number of participants by country is broken down as follows: Bangladesh - 25; India - 20; Philippines - 47; Sri Lanka - 20; Vietnam - 15; Malaysia - 15. Of the total number of respondents, 61 are women and 81 are men with ages ranging from 15 as the youngest and 35 as the oldest. The family size of the respondents range from four to nine family members. Majority of the surveyed youth are in high school while there are also university students and graduates, vocational studies graduates, and some finished primary schooling. A significant number of respondents come from indigenous farming communities.

### Economic conditions

Almost all agree that with the current condition of agriculture in their communities, income from farming and seasonal farm labor as main source of livelihood is not enough to provide a decent life for rural families. Majority of the youth are small farmers helping their families in cultivation; selling farm produce, ornamental plants and seeds; rearing some livestock; and finding additional paid farm work. Some households make a living through small-scale fishing which equally does not meet their needs. To augment household income, some leave for the city to work as wage earners including as construction worker, public transport driver, security guard, tourist guide and part-time employees in groceries and supermarkets. Some respondents' families in Malaysia earn income from family heads who are working in government or non-government organizations.

The average income range gathered from responses is from USD83 to USD324 per month. In India, the 100-day employment guarantee scheme popularly known as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee pays between Rs.3,000 to Rs.20,000 (USD 40-264) depending on the number of work days for agriculture and non-agriculture jobs. There are farmers in the Philippines who earn Php4,433 (USD87) a month which is a meager 28% of government's own estimate of the cost of living. Meanwhile, more than half of the respondents in Vietnam who are all full-time students and have families with a small business in the village or parents employed as government workers, say they are satisfied with their family income.





Most say their families own little land or that they farm in communal ancestral land even as some are inherited land. Nevertheless, many stated that land tenure is a major issue for farming families and indigenous communities. Bangladesh and the Philippines registered the majority respondents claiming most peasants do not own farm lands.

Chemical agriculture is practiced more widely than agroecological farming in the communities of four of the six surveyed countries namely Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Vietnam and in one survey group from the Philippines. All respondents' families from Vietnam are into chemical farming. In Malaysia, 80% of respondents' families employ a mix of traditional and chemical farming while some combine agroecology in their farming practice. On the other hand, more respondents in India and another survey group in the Philippines largely coming from indigenous villages say they practice agroecological, organic or traditional agriculture. Two respondents from the Philippines meanwhile stated their farms are transitioning to sustainable agricultural practices.

For all survey countries, the youth respondents point to rural poverty and economic hardships as factors driving migration of rural youth to the cities. They cite more specific reasons like the lack of employment and gainful income, lack of land or unstable tenure; or poor harvest that force young people to leave their farming villages. Even with subsistence-farming, they find it difficult to make ends meet. Let alone having additional produce to sell. Young farmers in India lament that their income instantly gets siphoned off come harvest time just by settling loans with middlemen. Encroachments by big agri-corporations like banana plantations also discourage the youth as these result to insecure land tenure and worsen the plight of small holder farms. General rural poverty compels young men and women to look for additional, better-paying jobs in the city.

Pursuing education is another significant motivation. In Sri Lanka, respondents affirm that moving to the city provides opportunities to gain higher education. Such advantage, according to youth in Vietnam, results to landing better-paying jobs. In addition, youth respondents in Malaysia perceive migrating to work and study in urban centers not only increases knowledge but also improves one's quality of life. This aspiration for a better future is what prompts rural parents in Vietnam to discourage their children from farming, which the former see as lowly, grueling and unprofitable.

Meanwhile, climate change impacts were also cited by some respondents in Bangladesh and India who blame extreme weather events or natural calamities, stress to groundwater resources, reduction of soil health and increasing soil salinity for worsening rural economic hardships that drive youth migration and displace families.

However, respondents from the Philippines and India ascertained that there are youth who choose to stay in the village because they value the land particularly their fertile ancestral land. The indigenous youth respondents said they want to preserve their community's culture of sharing and collectivism in farming practices. They are satisfied doing agriculture as their way of life in as much as their identity and culture as families and communities are tied to the land which is also their life source. The rural landscape had been their companion since childhood, home to their families and friends, and it is where the environment is "fresher and healthier" - all things precious to them.

As agroecology continues to gain ground and challenge chemical agriculture, some respondents in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka said the youth

want to improve their knowledge and skills through training. With continued practice of sustainable farming methods, they believe they can enhance production, harvest nutritious and safe food, increase income and be able to create local job opportunities to young people so they would want to stay in the community.

Some respondents in Malaysia and the Philippines mentioned the need to finish schooling as a reason for youth to stay in the village.

There are others, however, who may be forced to stay having no other better option. As explained by respondents from India, some youth get discouraged when they hear that those working in the city also end up in poor working and living conditions amid spiraling costs in urban centers.

To encourage young farmers to remain in agriculture, the replies gathered from respondents of six countries suggested improving the conditions of farmers and the rural economy through land distribution and reform, creating more viable agricultural livelihood opportunities, assisting local resource-based businesses that generate more jobs, providing fair and better wages for farm work, developing programs that focus on sustainable agroecological farming and fair trade, and supporting traditional knowledge and practices that increase resilience to climatic disasters.

The youth also emphasized the need to strengthen knowledge and skills on leadership, sustainable integrated farming technologies and rural entrepreneurship. Youth organizing is seen as crucial to promote education, participation, solidarity and activism for people-led rural development. They believe it is an effective tool to instill the importance of agriculture in developing food security, promoting collective welfare of the community and addressing dwindling interest of young people to peasant production.

Providing free, quality education and developing attractive curricula on agriculture, improving infrastructure like roads, markets, community halls and internet connection, enhancing social service delivery as well as sports and culture activities were also mentioned as vital.

## **ACCESS TO LAND AND RESOURCES**

Four survey countries, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and India, reported farmer families and communities owning land. Family inheritance of land is most common in Vietnam and Sri Lanka, and in the latter, older male children are given preference over inheritance. Albeit, in general, they have no deed or title to prove ownership. Most respondents in India and more than half in Malaysia stated they are cultivating ancestral lands. Meanwhile, more than half of youth surveyed in Malaysia said their lands are acquired through family inheritance - grandmother titles or fathers inherited the title.

In the majority ancestral and small holder farms, farmers are able to access resources like rivers and water systems, forests and land. Respondents point to village heads or members of farmers' organisations when referring to who are involved in decision-making or crafting regulations on the use of land resources. A survey group facilitated by Masipag in the Philippines even reported there were farmers given permission by tribal leaders to cultivate in ancestral land or who have gained access through inter-marriages with indigenous families.

In India, however, young farmers bemoan that community utilization of resources which was the custom in their villages has been impaired and



has deteriorated in recent decades. Control over natural capital has switched into the hands of the rich and powerful upper caste.

Such situation also transpires in many rural communities of youth surveyed in Bangladesh and another group in the Philippines where landlessness and control of resources by landlords, big politicians and giant corporations hold sway. In the former, young indigenous farmers reported they lost their ancestral land because of land grabbing. Farmers cannot freely use natural resources for cultivation, fishing and gathering of food because these are controlled by “rich and powerful” people. In the latter, sugar cane farm workers witnessed their vegetable crops get destroyed by paid goons of landlords.

Other key challenges gathered from respondents that aggravate farmers’ difficulties on access to land and resources include: the youth’s lack of awareness and interest to address rural issues; incapacity to purchase land; inability to take part in decision making and management; lack of supportive government policies and programs like adequate funding and infrastructure; or worse, state-landlord-corporate collusion which carries out political repression, fencing of indigenous lands or military violence - ultimately resulting to peasant dispossession and further youth despondency.

Without genuine land reform - the fundamental challenge to access and utilization - many young farmers cannot expect to own land and develop their capacity to maximize resources and make a decent living from agriculture.

### **Cultural practices and “development”**

Surviving for centuries, indigenous farming practices are a system of agroecological methods that have displayed resilient capacity for food production amid the current challenge of climate change. There is growing recognition of its concrete potential to ensure food security.

Respondents from six countries shared various traditional farming knowledge that their communities still practice. Some of these, however, are sadly on the decline either due to pressure from chemical agriculture or because of diminishing interest from young farmers.

Some of the practices cited are using traditional seeds; community seed selection and sharing; performing rituals and referring to the moon, sun and stars during planting season; invocations to keep away pests; producing compost, fertilizers and pesticides from local organic material; use of indigenous microorganism (IMO) and fermented plant juice (FPJ); crop rotation and intercropping that minimize pests and improve soil health; swidden farming; straw mulching; and community management of forests and water resources.

Culture-specific practices were also mentioned like the Kem method of pest control in Sri Lanka which uses plant-based materials and is rooted in religious rituals. There is the “*lusong*”, “*dagyaw*” or “*bayanihan*” in the Philippines which all refer to the community helping a farmer in cultivation. Much like the “*mitabang*” and “*mogitatatabng*” or the practice of collective work specific to the “*tatau kaasakan*” or wet rice cultivation in Malaysia.

All but one respondent in Malaysia, enumerating indigenous methods, said such are still being practiced. Surveyed youth in Bangladesh affirm that women are primarily leading the preservation and promotion of traditional knowledge and practice of sustainable agriculture in the country.

In general, the youth from all survey countries affirm their vital role to preserve and flourish their communities' traditional agroecological practices as they recognize both its potential and evidence on sustainable production, household nutrition and environmental protection. To this end, they see the need for continued parents-to-children learning (Philippines, Malaysia); training workshops and documentation of indigenous and innovation techniques (Bangladesh, India), farmers learning exchange (Sri Lanka, Vietnam) and a shift away from chemical farming (Philippines). Respondents from Vietnam also suggested the use of media to record or produce material on traditional agricultural practice, organizing community sharing, holding local activities or competitions on agroecology that bring together the old and young generation.

As these indigenous methods spring from collective praxis, the youth realize how such contribute to strengthening cooperation and solidarity within the community. They also acknowledge the contribution of community-based NGOs for reviving, promoting and developing these time-tested knowledge systems of sustainable agriculture.

Development in terms of infrastructure building, modern machinery and technological innovations in agriculture are generally seen by youth respondents as indicators of growth in rural production albeit with a caveat. Thus, youth from Bangladesh and the Philippines point to what they perceive are negative impacts of "development" such as the destruction not only of livelihoods but entire cultures of indigenous communities by extractive industries like mining and quarrying. Respondents from the Philippines also added land grabbing, labor migration and housing eviction even as they blame market-led modernization and profit-driven industrial agriculture as the culprit to perpetuating peasant landlessness and marginalization. Youth from Vietnam highlighted chemical agriculture's adverse effects to the environment like the grievous loss of biodiversity. In Malaysia, surveyed youth lamented the damage done to oceans by chemical fishing and electrofishing.

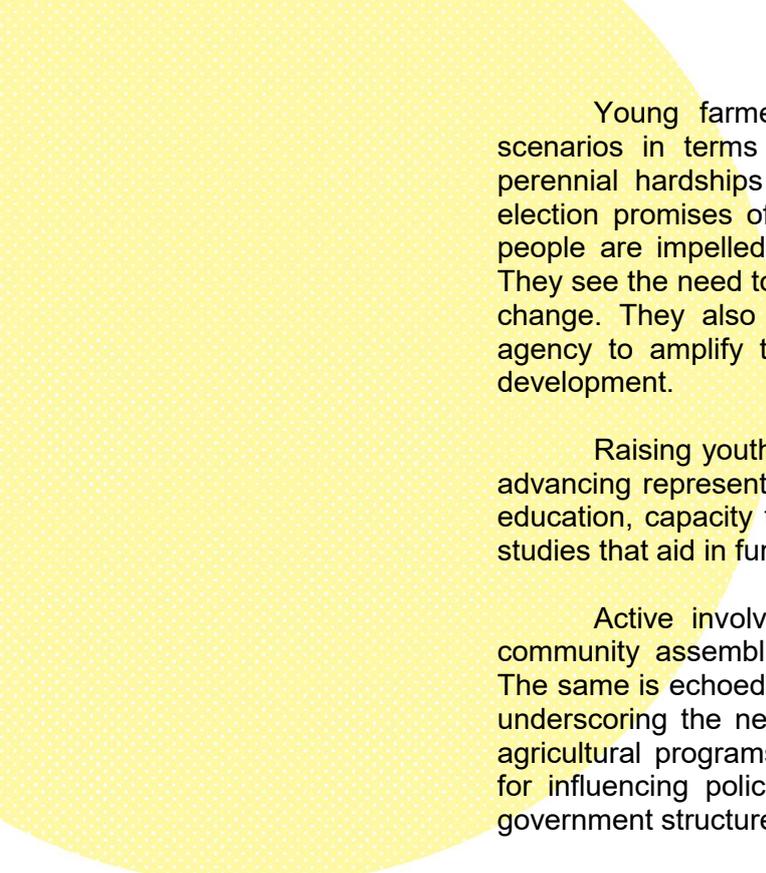
New media and social media enable wider platforms for youth learning and productive connectivity. On the other hand, respondents from India, the Philippines and Malaysia also cited media's negative impacts like promoting a consumerist culture and making the youth lazy and individualist. They said it also influences young people into wanting the "easy life" away from "dirty, back-breaking" farm life.

### **Representation and leadership**

Youth representation in the surveyed countries primarily takes the form of youth organizing for agriculture or socio-political advocacy. It is also institutionalized in the form of youth councils that are part of local government structures for policy and programming. These formations are deemed as fostering leadership, capacity building, knowledge exchange, cooperation and participation in decision-making processes.

But much remain to be done in terms of active youth involvement, particularly rural youth, especially in policy-making processes. Poverty, lack of access to education and prejudice oftentimes deprive rural youth of opportunities to develop agency and leadership to forward their interests. More so with young women's representation in the countryside where class and political inequalities entrench gender inequality.





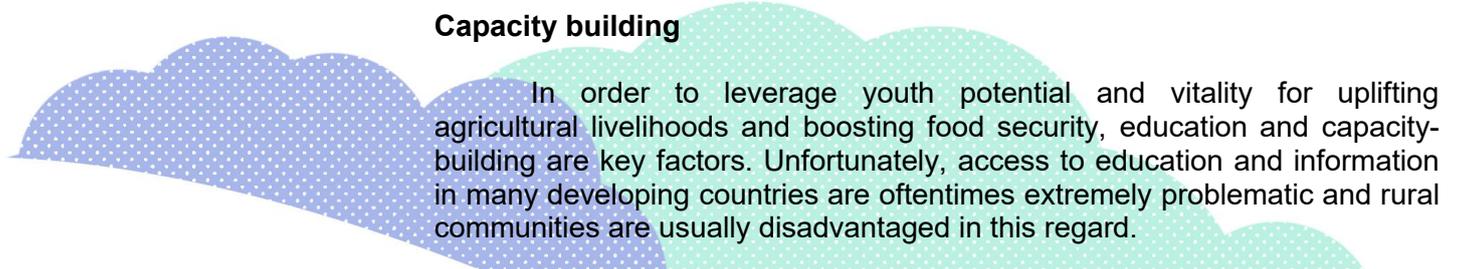
Young farmers surveyed in the Philippines point to contrasting scenarios in terms of youth voice in rural development. On one side, perennial hardships cause the youth to become cynical and depend on election promises of traditional politicians. While on another, many young people are impelled by the situation to study the issues that affect them. They see the need to collectively register their voice and demand meaningful change. They also welcome the support of CSOs that help them build agency to amplify their concerns especially in the context of people-led development.

Raising youth awareness and skills is, thus, an important requisite to advancing representation. The youth registered the need to carry out rights education, capacity training, consultations on rural development, as well as studies that aid in further understanding their situation.

Active involvement and taking leadership in the Gram Sabha or community assemblies were strongly suggested by respondents in India. The same is echoed by respondents in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Malaysia underscoring the need to infuse youth vibrance and inventiveness in local agricultural programs, policy and activities. It would also be advantageous for influencing policy if young leaders can take higher positions in local government structures as suggested by respondents in Vietnam.

This notwithstanding, political institutions oftentimes need to be engaged through political advocacy and social mobilization to meaningfully create spaces for youth participation. Hence, it is also imperative that the youth integrate their voice in alliances, coalitions and movements at the national and international levels.

### **Capacity building**

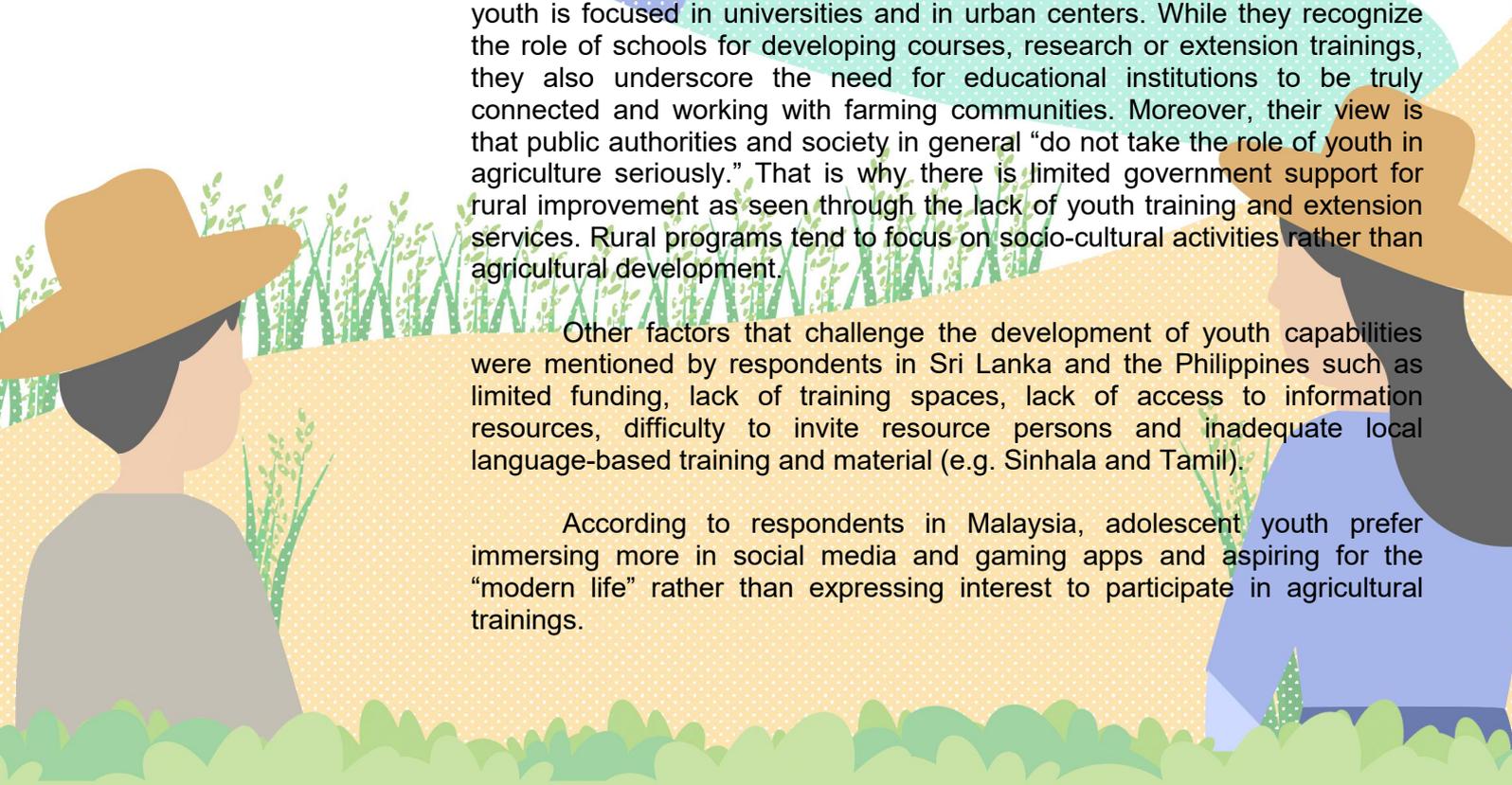


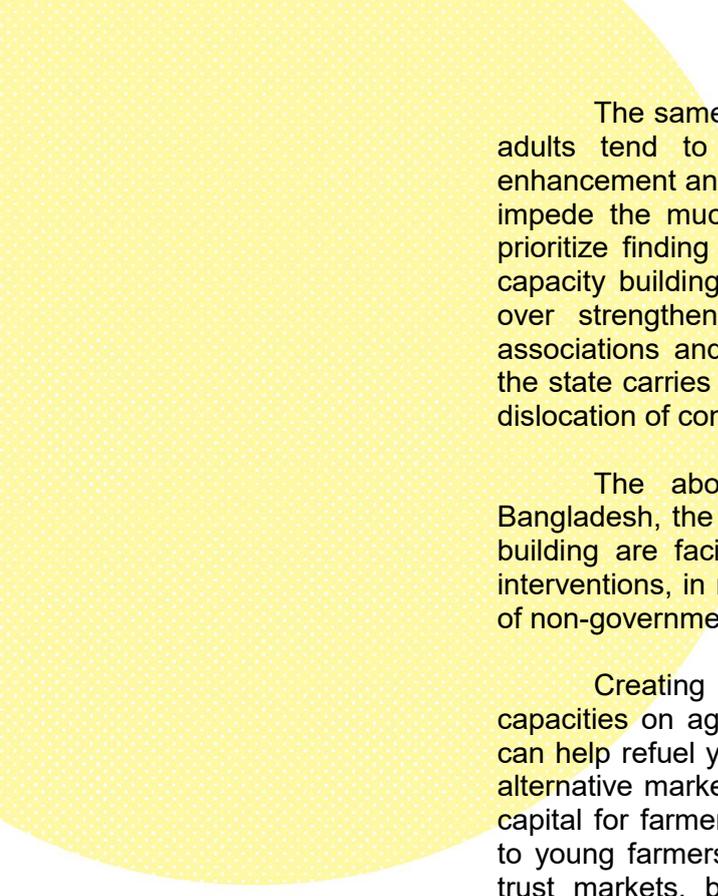
In order to leverage youth potential and vitality for uplifting agricultural livelihoods and boosting food security, education and capacity-building are key factors. Unfortunately, access to education and information in many developing countries are oftentimes extremely problematic and rural communities are usually disadvantaged in this regard.

Respondents in Vietnam affirm this, saying that capacity-building for youth is focused in universities and in urban centers. While they recognize the role of schools for developing courses, research or extension trainings, they also underscore the need for educational institutions to be truly connected and working with farming communities. Moreover, their view is that public authorities and society in general “do not take the role of youth in agriculture seriously.” That is why there is limited government support for rural improvement as seen through the lack of youth training and extension services. Rural programs tend to focus on socio-cultural activities rather than agricultural development.

Other factors that challenge the development of youth capabilities were mentioned by respondents in Sri Lanka and the Philippines such as limited funding, lack of training spaces, lack of access to information resources, difficulty to invite resource persons and inadequate local language-based training and material (e.g. Sinhala and Tamil).

According to respondents in Malaysia, adolescent youth prefer immersing more in social media and gaming apps and aspiring for the “modern life” rather than expressing interest to participate in agricultural trainings.





The same is true in the Philippines but respondents there said young adults tend to be more receptive to engaging in agricultural skills enhancement and innovation. The overarching problem of poverty, however, impedes the much-needed nurturing of youth skills as they are forced to prioritize finding jobs that pay rather than devote time to skills training or capacity building activities. Government sadly prioritizes corporate farming over strengthening the capacities of small farming families, farmers' associations and indigenous communities. Worse, there are cases where the state carries out intense militarization for counter-insurgency resulting to dislocation of community-based agricultural schools.

The above notwithstanding, majority of surveyed youth from Bangladesh, the Philippines and Malaysia claim that programs for capacity-building are facilitated in their communities. It is worth noting that such interventions, in most of their experience, are carried out through the efforts of non-government organisations and local youth or farmers' groups

Creating programs that build knowledge, transfer skills and raise capacities on agroecological farming systems and its continued innovation can help refuel youth interest in rural production. Aiding the development of alternative markets like community shared agriculture systems create social capital for farmer-consumer partnerships. This can send the right message to young farmers that not only can they earn decent income from mutual-trust markets, but also strengthen pride and respect for agriculture as invaluable to people's lives.

In addition to sustainable agricultural livelihood trainings that come with adequate infrastructure and funding, the respondents say they also need to build capacities in organizing, policy advocacy, alliance and movement building. These are necessary to generate youth solidarity and in engaging governments and institutions.



### **Aspirations and Barriers**

As individual members of the community, the youth aspire to acquire the right attitudes and skills to become successful. They want to become positive role models for other young people and be active movers who can uplift the condition of farmers. They long to own enough land that can offer sufficient harvest and improve economic capacity of their families.

Many respondents want to preserve their community's traditional knowledge and for the youth to play an active role in its promotion. They also aspire to strengthen agroecological agriculture which they believe can help address rural poverty. Surveyed youth in Bangladesh, for instance, want to reverse apprehensive attitudes toward agroecology and look forward to more young people getting involved in agroecological movements. Free and continued education, obtaining gainful and secured employment, and becoming successful in careers inside and outside agriculture are other aspirations cited by the respondents.



In general, respondents from the survey countries believe that rural youth want to gain decent employment and sustainable livelihood for their families; acquire higher education and improve their skills; achieve food security and "financial freedom"; manage their own agriculture- or non-agriculture business; and eradicate economic backwardness in the countryside. Understanding that they themselves play a huge part in realizing these, they look forward to the youth being more united, informed and galvanized to take needed social action.

They also aspire for a more protected and healthier environment to mitigate the impacts of climate change. They want secure tenure or ownership of the farmlands they cultivate, peace and prosperity in the villages. They want support from the community and for governments to truly engage farming community perspectives in achieving rural progress. Some also mentioned that they want to receive the prioritization and attention which they deem are an advantage given to urban youth.

Conversely, responses gathered from surveyed youth in terms of barriers to achieving their dreams yielded the following: the many facets of rural poverty like economic and financial insecurity, landlessness and land dispossession; lack of government support for people-led agroecological initiatives and movements; lack of rural infrastructure and social protection; inadequate education, access to technology and skills; and lack of a more responsive rural youth agenda. Political factors like militarization and curtailment of civil and political rights are also big impediments.

Lastly, they also mentioned cultural barriers like social discrimination as seen through low respect and recognition for farmers. Such low regard presents drawbacks even at the level of families and marriages where pursuing a livelihood in agriculture is discouraged by parents. Public awareness on rural people's rights and struggles are also very limited.

## Recommendations

Despite worries of lack of motivation and unity, respondents believe that the youth are hardworking and that their potential and dynamism, if utilized properly, can work to realize their avowed aspirations. Again, they deem youth voice and participation as indispensable to these goals and various sectors should come together to create the necessary pathways in policies, programs, infrastructure, interventions, etc.

Almost all respondents express willingness to join a youth organization that can enable them to collectively advance their interests. To help realize their aspirations, they put forward the following recommendations.

To improve economic conditions and livelihood:

- implement land reform to ensure land ownership and tenure and improve access to resources
- develop and provide support for sustainable agroecological agriculture in local communities
- build, support and strengthen community markets for organic farming produce that promote fair-pricing and producer-consumer partnership
- create more farm-related employment that provides decent income and work conditions to encourage youth to return to their farming communities
- improve rural infrastructure like roads, bridges, electricity, housing, markets, etc.
- improve access to supportive financial programs or subsidies in agriculture, technology and equipment

To build and enhance young farmers' capacities:

- provide accessible education and training on biodiversity-based ecological agriculture and design materials that utilize local language for more effective learning
- increase rural women's access to training, information and resources
- develop capacity in agroecology-based enterprise

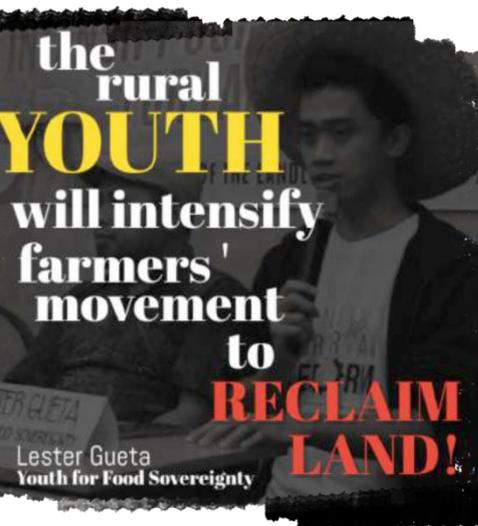


- develop model farms on sustainable agriculture and supporting farmers exchange-learning in local, national and international levels

To increase motivation among rural youth for agriculture:

- strengthen agricultural education in formal education, extension programs and community-based education initiatives
- elders and youth learning exchange to preserve traditional practice and its innovation in order to reduce or totally avoid chemical inputs
- give recognition to youth-led initiatives or youth role models in sustainable farming to promote concrete future prospects and help challenge prejudice against pursuing agriculture
- harness the potential and contribution of women in policy processes and programs for agriculture
- strengthen leadership through training and organizing that deepen awareness of rural issues, foster their collaboration and involvement in decision-making and planning processes
- link youth initiatives from different communities and strengthen the youth movement for agroecology and sustainable rural development
- strengthen farmers participation in conflict resolution in the countryside and halt militarization of farming communities

These recommendations are echoed by rural youth-focused and youth-led initiatives that seek to harness the youth's massive transformative power. At the heart of these consultations and solidarity formation is the forging of a rural youth agenda based on the fundamentality of land rights to social justice and equality, the urgency of food sovereignty to solve world hunger and environmental ruin, and the need for collective action to effect change.

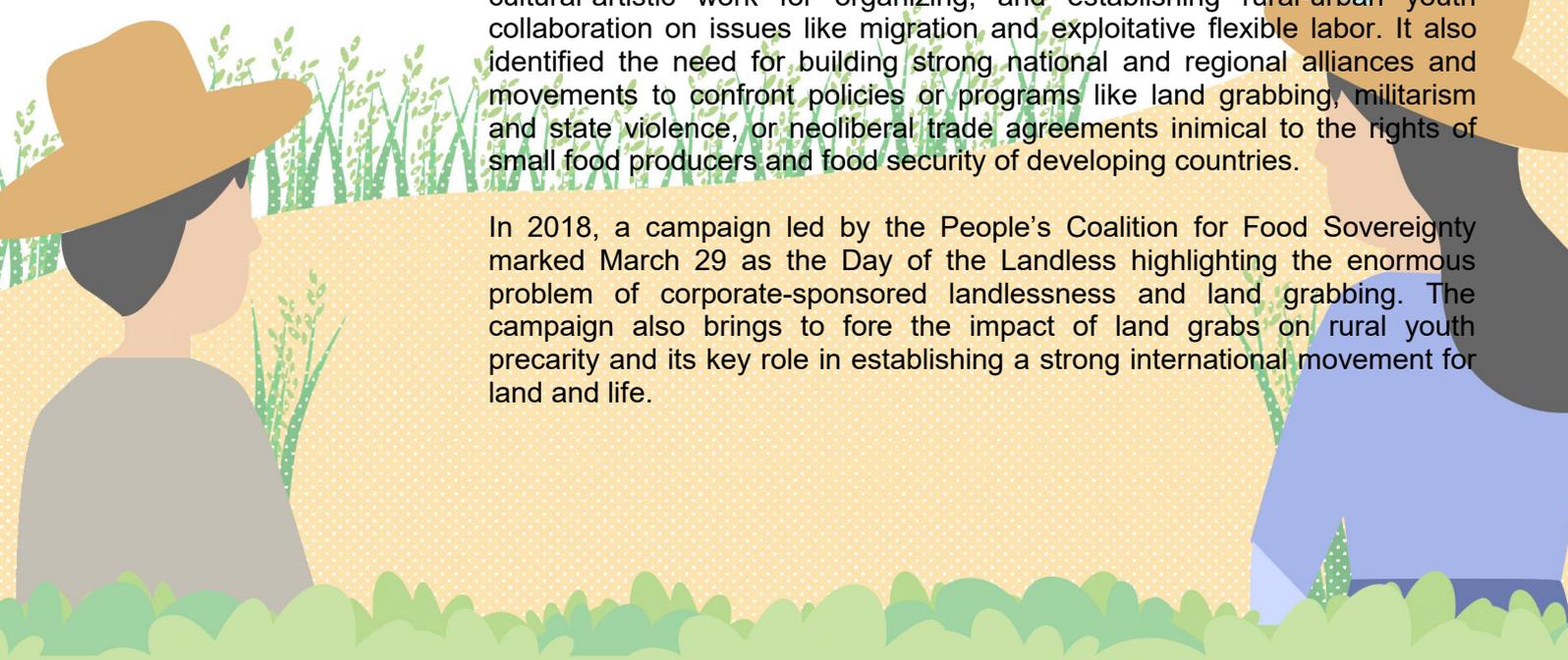


The Youth for Food Sovereignty (YFS) Network, for example, gathered nine countries in Asia in 2016 to build solidarity and action around the key issues of land, food and justice. The network agreed to build the movement for people's right to land and develop strategies for collective action like organizing among rural youth, initiating protest actions or launching land occupation and cultivation.

In advancing food sovereignty, YFS sees the need to promote active youth advocacy for agrarian reform, as well as building capacities on agroecology and sustainable food systems. This is done through knowledge platforms and exchange in order to promote decent youth livelihood, defend indigenous peoples' rights and address 'ageing' agriculture.

YFS also stressed the importance of engaging rural youth through organizing in local communities, fostering education and information, utilizing cultural-artistic work for organizing, and establishing rural-urban youth collaboration on issues like migration and exploitative flexible labor. It also identified the need for building strong national and regional alliances and movements to confront policies or programs like land grabbing, militarism and state violence, or neoliberal trade agreements inimical to the rights of small food producers and food security of developing countries.

In 2018, a campaign led by the People's Coalition for Food Sovereignty marked March 29 as the Day of the Landless highlighting the enormous problem of corporate-sponsored landlessness and land grabbing. The campaign also brings to fore the impact of land grabs on rural youth precarity and its key role in establishing a strong international movement for land and life.



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from Six Countries in Asia



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