LABOUR, RURAL YOUTH AND MIGRATION*

Chapter 8
Migration from rural areas to cities and from one country to another can create opportunities for adolescents and youth (15-24 years of age), such as enhanced educational opportunities and skills development. But the reasons that motivate migration must be addressed, to ensure that migration is an option, not a necessity for youth, particularly young rural women and men, who often face particular disadvantages in relation to access to quality education and decent work opportunities. When rural adolescents and youth migrate due to a scarcity of decent livelihood opportunities, they frequently lack the education, networks and skills to compete for decent jobs in already saturated urban job markets. Policies that successfully improve learning and employment opportunities in rural areas are needed, along with efforts to ensure that those who choose to migrate are equipped with adequate skills and information to find work, whether in urban areas or abroad.

Migration is widely understood as a livelihood strategy allowing households to diversify their income sources, facilitate access to goods and services or invest in income-generating activities. However, migration is not always the preferred choice, since it involves a great deal of personal risk, sacrifice and uncertainty. If policy outcomes for labour, social protection, education and health were more favourable, many young women and men from rural areas might prefer to remain in place. Returning migrants might be more inclined to invest their human or financial capital in rural development. This, in turn, could contribute to a virtuous rural development cycle that, over time, could help reduce some of the push and pull factors that motivate adolescent and youth migration.

This chapter describes some of the challenges faced by youth that frequently constrain their ability to find decent jobs in rural areas, and ultimately influence their decisions about migration. It also points to opportunities, offering examples of good practices and pointing to policies and strategies that could promote decent work opportunities for rural youth and harness migration as a means to promote rural development. Although this chapter focuses mainly on solutions for rural youth, it should be noted that these same young people, lacking information and skills, are found not only in larger towns and cities, but in other countries to which they migrate in search of opportunities.


This chapter is part of the book “Migration and Youth: Challenges and Opportunities” Edited by Jeronimo Cortina, Patrick Taran and Alison Raphael on behalf of the Global Migration Group © 2014 UNICEF*
Given that much international migration results in outcomes of working abroad, another important consideration is the age at which young people are allowed to work. The ILO Minimum Age Convention of 1973, ratified by 158 Member States, establishes that each State Party to the Convention must set a minimum age for admission to employment or work within its territory, and that the minimum age must not be less than the age of completion of compulsory schooling or less than 15 years of age. For Member States whose economy and educational facilities are insufficiently developed, the Convention allows the minimum age for admission to employment or work to be initially set at 14 years. The Convention also establishes that the minimum age for admission to any type of employment or work that, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out is likely to jeopardize the health, safety or morals of young persons, must not be less than 18 years.

CHALLENGES FACING RURAL ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH

Some studies argue that unemployment is the principal driver of youth migration.¹ Others stress the importance of both push factors at home – scarce employment and educational opportunities, the need to support family members, etc. – and pull factors in destination countries that include growing demand for foreign labour and skills and recruitment to attract migrant workers. These capture young peoples’ aspirations for well-being and access to remunerative employment. Studies in Bolivia, Cambodia, Central America and Nepal found that deprived adolescent girls and boys view migration as the most viable survival strategy.²

Among the key problems facing young people and influencing their decision to migrate are:

- **Lack of decent rural employment opportunities:** Today, more than 75 million youth are without employment, up by 4 million since 2007.³ In the rural context, under-employment, poor working conditions and the prevalence of working poverty among young people represent disincentives for rural youth to continue to live and work in their local communities.

- **Limited access to credit, resources and markets:** Young people frequently lack the skills, experience, access to assets, social networks and decision-making processes needed to create decent livelihood opportunities for themselves. The situation is often worse
for young women migrants, who are often concentrated in low-paying, unregulated "female" occupations (such as domestic service and nursing) and face additional gender-related barriers, such as heavy unpaid work burdens and discriminatory attitudes and practices. Many rural areas lack the viable road connections and processing and storage facilities needed to collect, process and transport rural produce – particularly perishable foodstuffs, to markets. Credit facilities are also often inadequate or absent in rural areas.

- **Lack of appeal of traditional agricultural work:** Although agriculture is still the main source of employment in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa (see Table 1), anecdotal evidence suggests that young people see agricultural work as an option of last resort. It is thus not surprising that many youth leave to seek work elsewhere, even when they lack relevant skills.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>1998</th>
<th>2008</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>World</td>
<td>41.6</td>
<td>34.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developed Economies &amp; EU</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central &amp; South-Eastern Europe (non-EU) &amp; CIS</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>18.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Asia</td>
<td>51.0</td>
<td>40.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South-East Asia &amp; the Pacific</td>
<td>50.2</td>
<td>42.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>South Asia</td>
<td>59.4</td>
<td>47.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America &amp; the Caribbean</td>
<td>22.1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>61.0</td>
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Source: ILO, "Key indicators of the labour market" Geneva, September 2009

- **Lack of information and skills to adapt to urban areas:** Deficiencies in rural education are well documented. Irrelevant curricula, scarcity of qualified teachers in rural areas, gender gaps in participation, gender-biased curricula and learning environments, prohibitive costs and lack of appropriate facilities and learning
materials all undermine the opportunities of rural youth to gain the education they need to compete in the labour market. In addition, when they migrate young people usually lack support networks, and are unprepared to overcome the risks to personal health and safety that exist in large cities or foreign countries; this is especially true for female adolescents and young women.

**Box 8.1. Reflections of a young migrant from Mexico**

As Marisela grew up in a small town outside of Mexico City, she became convinced of three things: there was no future for her in her small village, she needed to help sustain her family, and the sacrifice of leaving her family behind would allow her to resolve these challenges.

“I believed that going north would allow me to develop personally by taking advantage of the vast availability of jobs which would help me to assist my family. The first rude awakening was the assault and robbery on our group as we crossed the border. My fright moved me into a reality where I continued to discover that migration to another country was not going to be the easy path that I had thought.”

One of Marisela’s first barriers was language; as a girl she had limited schooling. She had the advantage of living with her sister and brother-in-law after arriving in New York, but each attempt to get a job, travel to work, or obtain social services — especially health services — was stymied by communication issues. In addition, she was young, she was a woman, and she did not have papers. The struggle was constant and at times, overwhelming. Five years later Marisela was trying to supplement her husband’s income by cleaning houses.


- **Lack of representation in decision-making processes:** Social structures in rural areas tend to be hierarchical. Youth lack economic independence and personal autonomy, are generally marginalised from decision-making processes and have less access to information. Barriers for young women, both in relation to participation and to obtaining land, good-paying jobs and advancement constitute important ‘push factors’ for female migration.

- **Re-integration into rural areas after migration:** While some young migrants return to their country of origin due to their inability to earn a living elsewhere, others return with new skills or financial capital, both of which could be valuable assets in support of rural development. Yet few initiatives (financial services, training programmes, networking opportunities) are in place to help these young people put their assets to work.
CHALLENGES FOR POLICY MAKERS AND DEVELOPMENT PLANNERS

The overall challenge is to make migration an option that can be weighed against the pursuit of viable agricultural and rural livelihood possibilities. The continued scarcity of high-quality data on both the impact of migration on young people and rural youth employment, disaggregated by gender, locality and age, makes it difficult to incorporate these issues into development policies and programmes. Moreover, limited data on rural youth employment do not adequately reflect labour market conditions. Without access to such data, development planning will continue to be gender and youth “blind” and will not reflect the local challenges that young people face. This information gap must be bridged if well-informed policy measures are to be designed to respond to the issue of rural youth migration. The focus should be on crafting policies that:

- Protect young people from abuse and exploitation during the migration process
- Facilitate their integration into host countries
- Create better opportunities in rural areas, so that migration is not the only option for a better life.

OPPORTUNITIES TO MAKE MIGRATION AN INFORMED CHOICE

**Education and training:** Enhanced education and training could create new livelihood opportunities for rural youth, reducing the need for them to migrate and enabling better management of the flow. Equipping them with practical skills, such as business and marketing know-how, as well as specific knowledge about rural activities – such as modern, climate-smart agriculture – could boost their opportunities to find employment or launch a micro-enterprise.

Extensive investment in training of young women and men and the creation of linkages between training programmes and rural farm and non-farm businesses could expand the range of options available to young rural people and ensure that their choices are not limited to migration.
Rural education and training programmes need to be gender-sensitive at all levels, ensuring the inclusion of young women, developing course curricula that take into account the different needs of women and men and systematically including gender-related issues in the training. Young migrant women are particularly vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation. Giving them adequate training and making them aware of the risks involved can reduce their vulnerability.

**Social rights:** Employment generation and training alone do not fulfil all conditions of the decent work agenda, which also includes labour rights, social security and social dialogue. Targeted initiatives to improve the quality of rural employment – such as monitoring and regulation of working conditions, implementation of innovative social protection mechanisms and facilitating the organisation of young rural workers to enable their participation in decision-making processes – are all important aspects of this process.

**Participation:** Farmers’ organisations and cooperatives should promote and facilitate the participation of young people in governance structures, giving them space to make their issues and concerns heard and become actively involved in defending their social, political and economic rights. Rural and farmers’ organisations could establish minimum quotas for youth participation on their directing boards and in their statutes, to actively and meaningfully involve young people in decision-making processes.

**ATTRACTING YOUTH TO RURAL AREAS: THE DECENT WORK APPROACH**

Decent rural employment is a key aspect of expanding opportunities for rural adolescents and youth. It enables potential young migrants to remain in their rural communities, and also provide those who have migrated with the option of returning. The approach calls for collaboration among national governments, development partners and the private sector to build capacities of rural youth and provide them with the resources, skills and technologies they need. Rural infrastructure, financial institutions, market information and linkages are essential ingredients for rural transformation.
‘Decent work’ is defined as productive work undertaken in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity. The decent work approach is based on four pillars:

1. Employment creation and enterprise development
2. Working conditions and social protection
3. Rights at work
4. Workers’ and employers’ organisation and social dialogue.

A decent work approach to rural youth employment promotes integrated interventions to increase productivity in agriculture through investments in economic and social infrastructure, as well as boosting the number of employment opportunities in on-farm and off-farm activities while improving occupational safety and health, social security and working conditions in general.

Promoting decent work prospects for rural adolescents and youth is becoming a priority in many countries, incorporated in national development frameworks. Several countries are developing and implementing programmes that target youth employment, or a particular group of disadvantaged young people, while others make young workers the beneficiaries of overall employment programmes. This approach has the potential to help manage youth migration and move toward a situation in which the decision to migrate is a choice made between viable alternatives, rather than one borne of necessity. Unfortunately, however, to date there has still been insufficient attention to the need to promote decent work for youth rural people in the context of these approaches.
Similar opportunities for decent employment can be created through investment in training of young women and men, and building local support networks comprised of local entrepreneurs to serve as mentors to young workers. These entrepreneurs would need training on how to integrate Decent Work approaches in their enterprises. IFAD supported the PROSPERER programme (Box 3), which offers an instructive example.

Box 8.2. IFAD-ILO Decent work programme

In 2011 a study undertaken by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the ILO reviewed 18 rural employment-generation programmes worldwide and studied in-depth five IFAD co-financed projects (Egypt, Madagascar, Nepal, Nicaragua and Senegal) in terms of the four pillars of decent work. The study demonstrated the relevance of the decent work approach for supporting improvements in young peoples’ living conditions in rural areas. Where the Decent Work approach was adopted, some 45 per cent of respondents reported improved employment situations in rural areas. Producers and entrepreneurs also had positive views on mainstreaming of Decent Work approaches, claiming an increase in productivity as a consequence of better working conditions for employees. Approximately 43 per cent of youth believed that training opportunities had improved. One of the most important findings was that 44 per cent of youth considered that they would be more capable of finding better rural employment opportunities.

This was especially true in the cases of Madagascar, Nicaragua and Senegal. In Senegal and Madagascar the success was mainly due to extensive investment in training of young women and men, and the build-up of local support networks of micro- and small-scale entrepreneurs who could offer mentorship and guidance to young workers. The entrepreneurs in Senegal were themselves trained on how to integrate Decent Work approaches in their enterprises, and most agreed that this had led to increased productivity. In Nicaragua and Madagascar an enabling policy environment complemented efforts to promote decent work opportunities for rural young women and men. Nicaragua’s producers’ cooperatives were involved in promoting decent work for rural youth, a strategy that produced successful results.

However, the study also indicated that employment generation and training alone do not fulfil other conditions of the Decent Work agenda, such as labour rights, social security and social dialogue. On these fronts the results were not as encouraging; rural employment policy frameworks in the five countries demonstrated little attention towards promotion of social security, labour rights or social dialogue, except for Nicaragua, where employment generation programmes for youth included social security provisions and social dialogue components.
Important motivations compelling rural outmigration are: lack of decent rural employment opportunities, limited or non-existent access to credit, resources and markets, and lack of appeal and viability of traditional agricultural work.

Young people who migrate from rural areas are often disadvantaged by the poor quality of their education and lack of training in skills applicable in non-farm labour markets. If rural schools provided young people with life skills and the tools to make informed decisions about their future, they would be better prepared both to migrate and to work in rural or urban settings, at home or abroad.

Decent rural employment is a key aspect of enabling potential young migrants to remain in their rural communities, and providing those who migrated with an option of returning.

Innovative, forward-looking rural development policies with a decent work approach can result in incentives for young people to remain in place or return to their country of origin, contributing to national agricultural and other development goals.

**Box 8.3. Facilitating micro-enterprise development for rural youth in Madagascar**

A successful example is the IFAD-funded project in Madagascar, known as PROSPERER, which helps young farmers to develop micro-enterprises to improve their income through training and apprenticeships, in conjunction with increased access to technology and financial services. As many as 50,000 new jobs are to be created under this programme. With increased investments, education and training, young people will have better potential for earning a decent living in their communities, in urban areas or when migrating abroad.
POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Gather gender- and age-disaggregated data and information about rural youth migration and employment, including data on education, credit, and rural infrastructure conditions and needs, and use the resulting evidence to systematically include youth migration issues into broader development plans and policies.

- Agricultural and rural development initiatives should contain components targeting rural youth and promoting youth-sensitive employment generation.

- Mainstream gender-sensitive ‘decent rural work’ into rural development policies and programmes.

- Improve the relevance and quality of rural education, particularly for skills employable locally and abroad as well as appropriate technology and productivity enhancement, and create linkages between rural education and training programmes and rural businesses.

- Establish or expand monitoring and regulation of working conditions, implementation of innovative social protection mechanisms and facilitating organising of young rural workers and of rural cooperatives.

- Ensure that financial institutions target and provide windows of credit accessible to rural youth, particularly returning migrants, and foster partnerships among governments and NGOs to promote financial literacy and access.

- Enhance rural development policies, planning and investment to improve infrastructure and access to viable markets for rural produce, upgrade agricultural productivity, apply appropriate technology, and extend rural education and vocational training.
NOTES


5 See, for example, P.S. Bennell (1999), “Learning to change: skills development among the economically vulnerable and socially excluded in developing countries,” *Rural Poverty report 2011,* Geneva; ILO and IFAD.

6 Specific problems that affect the schooling of girls and young women include: the lack of adequate sanitary services (private toilets and sanitary products) in rural schools, the road to school may be long and dangerous, traditional culture may favour boys’ education and in many rural areas early marriage forces girls to drop out of school.

7 FAO (2010), *Rural Youth Employment in Developing Countries: A Global View.*

8 World Bank (2009), *Africa Development Indicators: Youth and employment in Africa, the potential, the problem, the promise,* Washington D.C.

9 See, for example, C. Coenjaerts, et. al. (2009), *Youth Employment: Promoting Pro-Poor Growth,* OECD. Available at: http://www.oecd.org/development/povertyreduction/43280339.pdf.