

*GFRAS Issues Paper 1*

# Young people in a changing world

## Youth and rural advisory services

**David Suttie**



## GFRAS Issues Papers

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## Acronyms

GDP	gross domestic product
GFRAS	Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services
ICT	information and communications technology
RAS	rural advisory services
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
YPARD	Young Professionals for Agricultural Development

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## Abstract

In many developing countries, the population of young people is growing. This is especially the case in Africa and South Asia, where agriculture's share of gross domestic product is relatively high and urbanisation rates are relatively low. The prospect in these countries and regions for classical structural transformations, involving the emergence of manufacturing and services sectors as major generators of national employment, appears highly questionable. There are concerns, for example, over automation, sustainability, and entrenched comparative advantages of emerging countries in the export of manufactured goods.

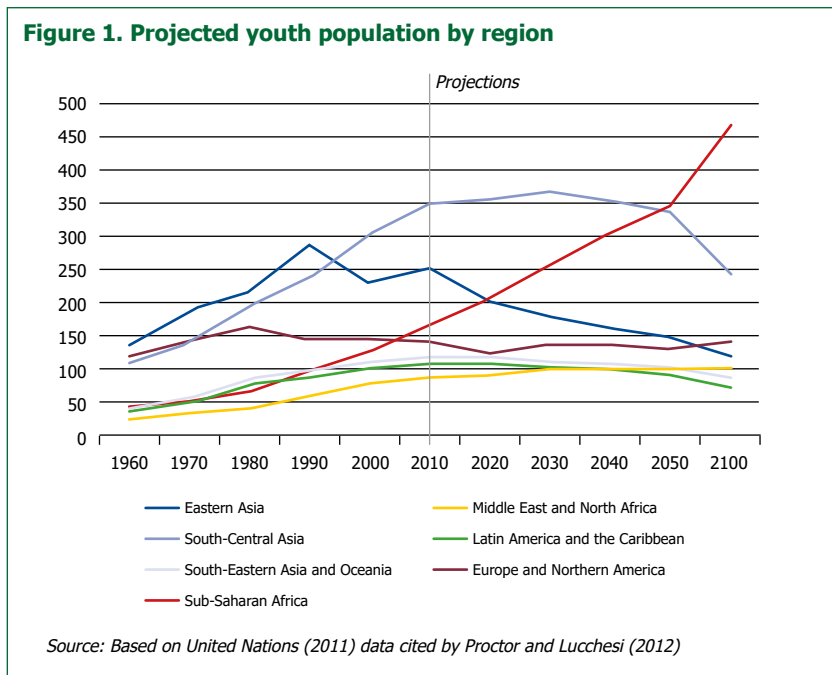
But higher incomes, urban growth, changing and increasing patterns of demand for food, the spread of technologies, and greater connectivity between rural and urban areas are creating new opportunities for skilled, remunerative work in agri-food systems. And skills development tailored to opportunities for young people in agriculture, agri-food, and other emerging sectors is strategically important for advancing progress across the Sustainable Development Goals. Rural advisory services (RAS) will need to be suitably adapted to the needs, challenges, and opportunities facing young women and men in today's rapidly changing economic, social, and environmental contexts. These services will play a role in influencing the overall socio-economic and institutional landscape facing young people, enabling them to shape the conditions needed for their engagement in all spheres of economic and political life.

Rural advisory services can facilitate the development of an enabling institutional and organisational environment, where stakeholders – including young people, smallholder family farmers, rural workers' groups, and rural women – are provided with enhanced capacities and spaces in which to articulate their needs and aspirations to decision-makers. At the institutional level, RAS can add significant value by brokering partnerships to tackle challenges that are particularly stark for rural youth – especially accessing finance and markets. Such approaches must be grounded in prioritising social inclusion, and especially gender equality, in access to RAS.

## Introduction

The growing population of young people in developing countries – most notably in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia (Figure 1) – means that youth skills must be a key element in sustainable development, and especially in the promotion of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Young people’s livelihoods are inherently linked with key ambitions of the 2030 Agenda – most explicitly SDG 8 on decent work for all (specifically Target 8.6, “By 2020, substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training”) and SDG 4 on quality education. There are also links to central tenets of the entire agenda, including eradicating poverty (SDG 1) and hunger (SDG 2). It is difficult to imagine how the necessary transformative changes and innovation required to reach such lofty ambitions would be feasible without engaging the younger generations.

The countries and regions set to experience the potential demographic dividend of an expansion in their working-age population are, in general, also those where agriculture still accounts for a relatively large share of national gross domestic product (GDP) and employment, and that have the lowest levels of



urbanisation (CFS 2017: p. 11). But the perception of a youth exodus from rural areas (FAO 2018) raises questions about the prospects for sustainable urbanisation. Services, connectivity, and investment in rural areas will be key to establishing mutually beneficial rural–urban links and avoiding an unbalanced, unsustainable, unidirectional out-migration of youth from rural settlements. In many locations, increasing connectivity between rural and urban areas is creating new opportunities for dynamic young people to adopt mobile livelihood strategies, such as taking seasonal employment in towns during the agricultural lean season. Such strategies can enhance young people’s access to market and employment opportunities while diversifying their income sources, and managing the riskiness and seasonality of agricultural activities (GFRAS 2018).

It is significant that in these countries and regions, classical structural transformations involving the emergence of manufacturing and services sectors as major generators of national employment appear to be unlikely (IFAD 2016). This is particularly due to concerns over automation, sustainability, and entrenched comparative (or absolute) advantages of emerging East Asian countries in the export of manufactured goods (*ibid.*: p. 193). With increasing smallholder productivity and incomes central to the implementation of SDG 2, farm- and non-farm-related food sector jobs are likely to be relatively important to the global sustainable development agenda in the years and decades ahead. And increasingly, dynamic rural–urban interactions – supported by the growth of intermediate cities and towns – are creating more opportunities for small-scale rural agri-food actors to benefit from enhanced market access (GFRAS 2018).

Many of the world’s developing countries face the scenario of a young demographic combined with the likelihood of food- and agriculture-related jobs being of strategic importance during the SDG implementation period and, possibly, beyond. Thus, skills development to enable young people to work in these sectors will be strategically important. Rural advisory services (RAS) will need to be suitably adapted to the needs, challenges, and opportunities facing young women and men in today’s rapidly changing economic, social, and environmental contexts.

This GFRAS Issues Paper discusses how RAS can become more directly relevant and be tailored to the circumstances of young people today. It begins by outlining the broad rural and agricultural context facing young people today; and the following section outlines trends, opportunities open to youth, and implications for RAS. The next section discusses entry points for RAS to enable young people to access emerging opportunities; and the paper concludes with an overview of the main issues.



## Youth in a changing world – implications for rural advisory services

Higher incomes, urbanisation, changing and increasing patterns of demand for food, and the spread of technology are creating new opportunities for skilled, remunerative work in agri-food systems. Better transport infrastructure is improving connectivity between rural and urban areas, and the majority of urban growth in the decades ahead is projected to take place in intermediate towns of fewer than 500,000 inhabitants (UN-DESA 2014). These phenomena, along with the spread of information and communications technologies (ICTs), are enhancing rural food producers' access to markets in nearby towns and further afield. Enhanced connectivity is also creating more dynamic patterns of mobility, with especially young rural people more likely to migrate between their rural homes and other (generally larger) towns and cities, either on a seasonal basis to diversify income sources during the agricultural lean season, or on a longer-term, semi-permanent, or permanent basis (Suttie and Vargas-Lundius 2016; FAO 2017; GFRAS 2018). This mobility offers new and enhanced livelihoods for young people, and enables increasingly mobile youth to bring new innovations, knowledge, resources, and sources of investment to their rural places of origin over time. At the same time, young people's perceived disengagement with agriculture and increasing migration to urban areas creates concerns about the loss of the most energetic and dynamic members of rural and agricultural communities (Oucho *et al.* 2014; Chander n.d.a).

These trends present potential livelihood opportunities for burgeoning youth populations in many developing countries. But opportunities will be realised only where young rural people are equipped with adequate skills, knowledge, and information to participate in emerging product, service, and labour markets that are increasingly dynamic and demanding. Young people traditionally face barriers to accessing productive land, finance, and decent employment, which are especially stark among sub-groups including school leavers, single mothers, and youth from ethnic minorities. If holistic, complementary measures are not adopted at policy, institutional, and investment levels to specifically address these exclusionary factors, we face the unedifying prospect of young people being among those least likely to benefit. Serious potential impediments to the prospects of young people in rural areas include a lack of policy level support for smallholder family farming; disadvantages of farms in accessing services, including finance; and a lack of essential social protection such as pensions to ease the intergenerational transfer of farms from elder to younger generations. And already present and expanding threats posed by climate change and environmental degradation, as well as increasing population pressures on land in regions where the projected youth bulge is especially stark (Table 1), will call

for new, knowledge-intensive approaches to agriculture and natural resource use and management. These elements will be particularly important to address in a global context where natural resource- and climate-based pressures and conflicts are causing disruption and displacement of both young and older generations. This paper explores the role of RAS in responding to these realities, either as a direct provider or as a broker, to foster opportunities for the youth of today and tomorrow to contribute to and benefit from the transformation of agriculture and related agri-food sectors into attractive, modern, and remunerative sectors in which to work.

**Table 1. Trends in farm size – Africa**

Land-constrained Africa*			Land-abundant Africa*		
Country	Year	Average farm size (ha)	Country	Year	Average farm size (ha)
Ethiopia	1977	1.4	Botswana	2004	1.9
	1990	0.8	Burkina Faso	1993	3.9
	2002	1.0	Cameroon	1972	1.6
	2012	1.0	Côte d'Ivoire	1974	5.0
Kenya	1974	4.1		2001	3.9
	1980	2.5	Ghana	1970	3.2
	1997	2.4		1999	2.8
	2004	2.5		2006	3.2
	2010	2.1	Madagascar	1961	1.0
Malawi	1969	1.5		1980	1.3
	1981	1.2		2005	0.9
	1990	0.7	Mali	1960	4.4
	2009	1.4		1980	3.3
Nigeria	1994	2.5		2005	4.1
	2010	1.4	Senegal	1998	4.3
Rwanda	1980	1.2	Tanzania	1970	1.3
	2006	0.7		1996	1.0
Uganda	1963	3.3		2003	2.4
	1991	2.2	Zambia	1970	3.1
	1996	1.6		2001	3.6
	2006	0.9		2008	3.7
<i>Average</i>	<i>(latest year)</i>	<i>1.2</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>(latest year)</i>	<i>3.0</i>

Source: Jayne et al. (2014): p. 4

\*Countries with population per km<sup>2</sup> of agricultural land greater than/less than 100 people.

## Youth and agri-food systems – emerging trends and opportunities

The agriculture sector employs the largest numbers of young people in most low- and middle-income countries globally (World Bank and IFAD 2017). In the majority of sub-Saharan African and South Asian countries, agriculture remains the bedrock of rural economies, and rural populations are projected to continue to expand in the years ahead (*ibid.*). So it is clear that this sector will remain strategically important for addressing youth employment challenges. Within agriculture, smallholder family farming remains the dominant farming model in most developing (as well as many developed) countries, accounting for a major – often majority – share of employment and food production (Wiggins 2009; HLPE 2013; FAO 2014). Thus, one of the traditional areas of focus for RAS – increasing the returns to labour on smallholder farms – will remain imperative for efforts to respond to the needs of youth, although specific methodologies, entry points, and scope may be in need of tailoring. At the same time, trends such as commercialisation and deregulation, increasing communication and integration across value chains, and rising literacy levels indicate the utility of RAS developing more of an agri-entrepreneurship perspective within smallholder farming, rather than a more limited, traditional focus on returns to farming labour (Chander n.d.b). This would involve assessing the skills and competencies needed to develop profitable agri-enterprises, as well as ingrained challenges that limit the success of youth businesses (OECD 2017).

While the traditional agricultural domain of RAS will remain relevant into the future, emerging trends and the particular interests of young people will lead to a widening of focus. At a minimum, this implies the need to adopt a broader, food systems-wide scope. Increasing demand for high-value agricultural products and associated opportunities for remunerative downstream value addition activities offer some of the potentially most attractive livelihood opportunities for rural youth in the years ahead. Some country-level data indicate that many young people are already working in these areas. For instance, World Bank and IFAD (2017: p. 9) report that, in India, more young people than other adults are involved in these types of non-farm, downstream activities. The processes integral to structural transformation are advancing at country level, ultimately leading to a reduction in the share of GDP and employment within agriculture and increasing relative shares in manufacturing and services that are largely focused on food systems and centred in rural areas due to locational advantages (*ibid.*). Within RAS, more systematic attention would be merited to downstream, non-farm agri-marketing and processing activities, recognising these as key entry points for youth engagement.

While agriculture and food systems work are expected to remain key areas for rural youth, it is reasonable to assume that urbanisation, structural transformation, and migration will lead to an expansion of the availability of non-food-related economic opportunities. With young people more likely than older adults to migrate (World Bank 2006), and expanding towns in the proximity of rural areas acting as an economic pull factor, the traditional food and agricultural focus of RAS may merit further reflection. In particular, the proliferation of communications and transport infrastructure that is expanding rural–urban linkages in many countries suggests that many non-food-related employment and entrepreneurship opportunities will be located in intermediate towns serving as centres linking nearby rural settlements. The barriers to structural transformation experienced by many low- and lower-middle-income countries (described above) mean it will be important not to overstate the potential for traditionally more urban sectors to offer new opportunities for young labour market entrants in the years ahead. Losch *et al.* (2014), for example, caution against the expectation that the movement of labour from agriculture to non-farm activities observed in classical structural transformation processes is replicable in many of today's developing countries. So the focus of RAS, while remaining largely on agriculture and food-related activities, should expand to encompass location-specific non-food opportunities that are likely to emerge, and to appeal to increasingly mobile youth cohorts.

## **How can rural advisory services help create opportunities for young people?**

### **Influencing the macro-level environment in which young people live and work**

The underlying causes of young people's disenchantment with – and in some cases disengagement from – rural life fall into two categories. First, broad socio-economic factors limit opportunities for economic, social, and cultural enrichment in rural areas, and are driven by stark developmental deficits in rural compared with urban areas as a result of underinvestment and a lack of enabling policies to support key rural sectors such as smallholder farming. This tendency, elaborated by Lipton (1982: pp. 66–69) over three decades ago, and acknowledged as a factor limiting progress across the Millennium Development Goals (United Nations 2015), limits the efficacy of RAS and poses a major challenge at the enabling environment level. With improved rural–urban mobility, young people aspire to live in areas with access to services, training, employment, and recreational activities, pointing to the importance of these being available in rural areas.



Photo: Nico Parkinson; USAID Food and Enterprise Development Program for Liberia (FED)

Second, constraints faced by rural economies and rural actors tend to be exacerbated for young people. Lack of opportunity and capacity to engage in decision-making, policy, and planning processes, age-related barriers to accessing land, lack of relevance of rural education to the realities and challenges of rural life, and gendered norms that see young women in some communities excluded from prospects of inheriting land and becoming economically independent, all tend to exclude young people from the (often limited) opportunities that are available in rural economies.

Consequently, in analysing how RAS can equip young people with tools and capacities to live lives they value and engage in productive, prosperous, and enriching activities in all spheres of their communities, it is necessary to consider both the overall environment in which rural youth live and work, and the specific challenges this group – and its sub-groups – face.

### **Linking with young people's aspirations**

When considering macro-level agri-food and rural realities, more focus is needed on young people's aspirations, and how to foster opportunities that respond to them. The aspirations of rural youth are not well understood, or necessarily listened to and taken account of – an unfortunate truth, given the demographic

trends described above and the fact that it is more than three decades since the work of Chambers influenced a proliferation of approaches to enable the poor to participate in development processes (e.g. Chambers 1983: pp. 108–111). Literature, events, and projects where rural youth have had an opportunity to have their voices heard tell us that opportunities in farming and related sectors must be characterised by use of modern technologies, links with remunerative value chains, and high levels of skills and returns in order to attract young people (IFAD 2011; FAO *et al.* 2012; CFS *et al.* 2015). This requires investment – public and private – and a range of enabling policies to support key rural sectors, including smallholder family farming and related food sector activities, to transform these activities from the frequently labour-intensive, low-productivity, low-return scenarios that still prevail in many rural areas of regions experiencing youthful population bulges, despite some encouraging productivity advances in recent years (Wiggins 2014). Poor quality of rural infrastructure and the rural built environment, including housing, also needs attention and investment if young people are to consider living their lives in rural areas. For RAS then, before we can talk of mechanisms to reach out to and engage with youth, it is necessary to reflect on how, on a broad level, the RAS community can contribute to bringing about the types of transformation needed to incentivise youth to devote their energies, talents, and dynamism to the agri-food, agricultural, and rural sectors.

It is essential to consider specific entry points that respond to the opportunities and challenges young people are facing. These include opportunities in high-value niche segments (such as organic produce), opportunities downstream of value chains (such as agri-processing), farming high-value products requiring relatively small plots of land (such as chicken rearing, berry and fruit cultivation, and herbs), and expanding areas such as agri-tourism. Social media platforms and ICTs offer potentially exciting and lucrative entry points for young people, as emerging opportunities in online marketing and branding enable links with higher numbers of consumers demanding fresh, organic, and high-value niche products. Some of these areas are already beginning to receive greater attention and traction within RAS, although there is a need to focus specifically on young people's realities and aspirations by targeting and involving them more systematically. To attract young people, the image and presentation of RAS may need further attention. Initiatives could include participating in entrepreneurship forums, making presentations at higher education events, running and participating in seminars for school- and post-school-aged women and men, and using social media to reach young people. Youth mentoring has already shown promise (OECD 2017), and the RAS community could launch such initiatives to develop role models and showcase success stories, increasing the attractiveness

of agri-entrepreneurship to young rural people. Efforts to link groups of young women and men with agricultural scientists and agri-entrepreneurs to provide them with specialised information on modern agricultural techniques and emerging business opportunities in food systems have been shown to enhance young people's perception of the agri-food sector as a viable career option. Initiatives such as the Young Professionals for Agricultural Development (YPARD) mentoring programme for youth have received appreciation from young people on blogs and social media, and indicate promising results in making agriculture attractive to young people (e.g. Chander n.d.c).

### **Fostering young people's participation in shaping agricultural and rural development**

The impact RAS can have on young people's livelihoods will depend on trends in a range of other sectors, including rural infrastructure development, financial services, and institutional arrangements within markets for inputs and outputs (Sulaiman and Blum 2016). While there may be limited scope for RAS to directly influence policy and investment outside the immediate extension and advisory services spheres, it can – and must – play an important facilitating role in enabling rural stakeholders to link with and shape processes in which decisions affecting their livelihoods are made. And in the specific context of youth, clearly young rural people cannot be – as has been and is still overwhelmingly the case – peripheral to these processes (FAO *et al.* 2014).

In this respect, three implications emerge as particularly pertinent. First, RAS must help to strengthen rural organisations (including farmers' organisations, cooperatives, rural workers' associations, and women's groups) to identify and articulate their needs and create opportunities for their meaningful interactions with policy-makers, planners, and development practitioners.

Second, there is a role for RAS to sensitise rural organisations to the importance of enabling young people's participation in institutional structures – including in leadership positions – to ensure that the needs of young rural women and men are integral to these groups' internal and external discussions.

Third, engagement with and strengthening of youth networks, clubs, and organisations will enable them to represent their interests in public discourse and decision-making processes, given the specificities of their needs, challenges, and aspirations, and relevant decision-makers' often poor understanding of these. Youth organisations can then serve as important platforms to target young people with RAS – equipping them with soft skills such as leadership, communication, and business competencies as well as technical skills training



Photo: Harandane Dicko; UN Photo

(Chander n.d.a). These youth organisations, brokered by RAS, can also play an important role as bridges to government institutions, public service providers, and higher education providers. Social media and other online platforms offer significant scope for greater networking, organisation, and information-sharing among young people, with RAS potentially playing an important coordination role. In sum, if RAS are to fulfil a role in generating opportunities for economic, social, and cultural enrichment among young people, a key entry point must be providing opportunities for this group to have their voices heard and listened to at all levels of public life.

### **Coordinating and linking key actors in agri-food value chains**

Increasing integration of agri-food value chains; stronger links and interactions between rural and urban areas, with small and intermediate towns acting as key locations; and expanding mobility of people (labour), goods, and services across rural and urban settlements can potentially drive the development of attractive and dynamic opportunities for young people (Hussein and Suttie 2016). For this to happen, conducive policy and investment frameworks need to be in place, driven by young people's participation in decision-making and planning processes. These dynamics also call for a high degree of coordination among a wide range of actors across agri-food systems in diverse (rural and urban) settlement types. Certainly, RAS would be well placed to coordinate sharing of knowledge, information, and technologies among the different actors in agricultural innovation



systems (GFRAS 2015) and to facilitate enabling institutional arrangements to ensure young people are well placed to benefit from these exchanges. The needs of the food systems of the future – and the young people who will hopefully be engaged in them – suggest that knowledge-sharing will be needed on topics such as adaptation to climate change, promoting women’s empowerment, management and use of natural resources, and opportunities and challenges associated with labour mobility. Over and above this knowledge-brokering role, the effectiveness of RAS can be greatly enhanced by facilitating effective arrangements to extend access to financial services, land, and markets for young rural people, in collaboration with other public development actors and private investors. Rural advisory services may work with young beneficiaries of such services to share success stories through online platforms and other digital media (Chander n.d.a). It is also worth exploring how young people can be directly trained and engaged as agricultural service providers through RAS.

Success in promoting positive change – including expanding the use of new technologies – depends on the availability of a whole package of services (Röling 1988), and there may be a risk of RAS taking on too many responsibilities outside the traditional domain of promoting the voluntary adoption of productivity-enhancing technologies. This suggests the need for a focus on value chains and the profitability of agri-food-related businesses, rather than the more traditional focus on agricultural productivity. Disappointingly, over the years, progress has often been slow to improve the livelihoods of smallholder family farmers due to a failure to address the range of constraints this groups faces (IFAD 2014; Kakooza 2014; Wiggins 2015). When dealing with young people, time is not a luxury we have at our disposal. This is precisely where RAS has a key role to play in combining its direct role of offering advisory services with a brokerage role in bringing together multiple (public and private) partners to offer bundled products and services to (especially young) people. Greater plurality within RAS, in particular driven by increasing participation of the private sector (GFRAS 2013), feasibly offers greater scope for RAS to play this role effectively. Expanding mobile technologies offer a significant opportunity to reach large numbers of young people and develop an entrepreneurial culture among them (Saravanan and Suchiradipta 2015). This is especially the case as young people are more likely than older adults to own mobile phones and to adopt financial, training, and extension services through digital means (World Bank and IFAD 2017: p. 15). However, relatively slow uptake of digital technologies in regions where youth populations are highest (sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia) (World Bank 2016) calls for specific investments and policies to extend outreach. Key means of achieving the effective bundling of RAS with other services include

identifying public and private partners with essential capacities and shared commitment, identifying a product champion for effective dissemination, and involving extensionists as the human interface of services (Kakooza 2014).

### **Need for new and enhanced capacities in rural advisory services**

It is clear that RAS will require new capacities at individual, organisational, and enabling environment (system) levels to fulfil a wider, more complex, and dynamic role in developing agri-food systems that appeal to young people and encourage their participation and engagement (GFRAS 2013, 2015). At the individual level, RAS will require staff who are sensitive to the imperative of involving youth in agri-food systems broadly, and in agricultural innovation systems in particular. Professionals in RAS will need capacities and tools to use the full range of modern ICT and online mechanisms to reach young people – social media, online networking, and mobile technologies. Extension professionals will need a range of technical knowledge about ongoing transformations and dynamics within agri-food systems, and how rural–urban dynamics are feeding into these in particular contexts. In this respect, links between agricultural innovation systems and broader territorial approaches to development may be designed to respond to these dynamics. Effectively addressing complexities and challenges will require extensionists to have capacities in facilitating social and institutional exchanges and advancing key social innovations in areas such as gender equality, human mobility, land tenure arrangements (including intergenerational transfers), and natural resource management and use. Some of these capacities will link to conflict mediation and avoidance, bearing in mind that increased competition over natural resources is one of the drivers of conflict (Bouzar 2016). Entrenched inequalities and social exclusion – including among young people – also contribute to tensions and upheavals, which in turn potentially lead to displacement and disruption of livelihoods among both young and older populations. The role of RAS in fragile situations will be explored further in a forthcoming GFRAS Issues Paper.

In the context of discussions around the dual need to equip extension agents with more sophisticated and wide-ranging capacities while facilitating greater involvement of young people in agri-food innovation systems, an intuitive entry point is providing pathways for young people to work as extensionists. This is in line with the tendency towards bottom-up models in RAS due to an acknowledged need for greater client focus and understanding of complex and heterogeneous local dynamics (Röling 1988; Faure *et al.* 2015). There is also consensus around the need for greater engagement of rural people generally – and rural youth especially – in learning and innovation systems (CFS 2015). This



Photo: Curt Carnemark; World Bank

suggests a direct role for RAS in providing opportunities for young people to be employed as extension agents, focusing on increasing digitalisation of services and young people's particular affinity for e-communication tools. To ensure these young women and men have the opportunity to develop the requisite capacities and knowledge, certain conditions need to be in place at the enabling environment level. These will be pertinent for developing the capabilities of interested young people to work as effective extension agents, and for enhancing the skills of young people more broadly to engage in the complex, dynamic agri-food systems of today and tomorrow.

First, advocacy is needed for investments and policies to significantly increase the accessibility and quality of formal education in rural areas, in light of alarming rural–urban gaps (even more stark when gender is taken into account). UNESCO (2012) note that, despite progress in improving school enrolment rates, in many countries rural girls are being left behind. For instance, in Ethiopia 43% of poor rural girls aged 7–16 have never attended school, while in Egypt around one in five young rural women aged 17–22 were found to have less than two years of schooling.

Second, the lack of integration of agriculture and food systems into rural school curricula is at odds with the numbers of rural young people working in these areas,

and with the needs of related sectors (IFAD 2013; CFS *et al.* 2015), and the need to link these with education in entrepreneurial competencies is increasingly being recognised (OECD 2017). Rural advisory services can play a direct role in working with school children to create awareness about opportunities in agriculture and rural life generally, as well as linking with partners and policy processes to advocate for integration of agri-food and agriculture issues within rural curricula.

Third, more systematic links are needed between RAS and local informal and traditional systems where young people acquire much of their knowledge and skills (Robinson-Pant 2016), creating synergies, mutual learning, and understanding of context. This point may be taken up more directly by RAS, while the previous two imply more of an advocacy role for RAS – and for the rural organisations which they must endeavour to link with policy processes.

### **Ensuring young women benefit from rural advisory services**

As well as facing gendered barriers to accessing land and productive resources (e.g. FAO 2011), women have less access than men to RAS (Ragasa *et al.* 2013; Colverson 2015; Petrics *et al.* 2015). This can be attributed to the frequent lack of recognition of women as RAS clients, with a tendency to regard men as lead farmers and to base RAS around this group's market-based interests (Colverson 2015; Petrics *et al.* 2015). Also, the gendered division of labour in much rural and family farming household work often inhibits women's availability to participate in RAS sessions (Petrics *et al.* 2015). These tendencies have implications for the prospects of young women to benefit from RAS. Combining this with gender-based constraints in land rights and inheritance, which in some cases lead to increased levels of rural out-migration among young rural women (Tacoli and Mabala 2010), and with traditional norms concerning young women's roles in rural family life, it becomes clear that specific attention is needed to know how RAS can contribute to overcoming the constraints faced by young women in rural areas.

Rural advisory services can play both a direct and a facilitating role in addressing these realities. In a direct sense, it is important to ensure that young women are given the opportunity to participate meaningfully in sessions of extension and advisory services. Participatory facilitation of RAS needs to be emphasised, especially the principle of involving all members of the community, including all ages and genders. In particular, key questions around schedules, responsibilities, and reasons for participation or non-participation of all community and household members must be considered (Colverson 2015). Encouraging wider use of labour-saving technologies, on- and off-farm, will be important to ease young women's household work burdens and increase their availability to



Photo: Ray Witlin; World Bank

participate in RAS. Ensuring session scheduling is sensitive to young women's responsibilities, and considering the adoption of single-sex sessions to build the confidence of young women, who may be unused to voicing their opinions in the presence of especially older men, can help to foster young women's participation (*ibid.*), as can the employment of more female extension agents, as well as gender-sensitisation training for male extensionists (Ragasa *et al.* 2013).

Within RAS curricula, there is a need to sensitise young women, young men, and older adults to the importance of gender equality. This may relate to realising the individual rights of young women, as well as long-term benefits to the community associated with empowered female youth, including improved health, nutritional, and educational benefits for children (Quisumbing 2011). Functioning as a broker, RAS can organise groups of young women; inform about rights, including sharing information on rights and laws via mobile technologies; and build capacities to advocate for these rights at household, community, and policy levels. This will help build the conditions where greater involvement of young women in RAS leads to concrete socio-economic impacts for them and their families.

## Conclusion

Agricultural and food systems are key to promoting central elements of the 2030 Agenda – the achievement of zero hunger (SDG 2), decent work (SDG 8), reduced inequalities (SDG 10), and sustainable communities (SDG 11). Clearly, it will be necessary to attract young people to engage in the transformation of agriculture, food production, and related non-farm activities. Approaches to tailoring RAS to young people must be grounded in this overarching reality. In addition to their direct role as service providers, RAS have an important facilitating role in contributing to an enabling institutional and organisational environment where key stakeholders (rural youth, smallholder family farmers, rural workers' groups, rural women) are provided with enhanced capacities and spaces in which to articulate their needs and aspirations to decision-makers. At the institutional environment level, given the increasing plurality of the rural services sector, RAS can add significant value through their unique intermediary position by brokering partnerships. Such partnerships, especially between organisations for, and involving, rural young people on one hand, and actors such as private investors, finance providers, and public agencies working on rural development on the other hand, can contribute to overcoming challenges that are particularly stark for rural youth – accessing finance and market integration being among the most pronounced (OECD 2017). In an increasingly dynamic, complex, and interdependent rural and urban reality, there is significant scope for RAS providers to apply the plethora of emerging technologies and methods to provide youth (and extension agents, among whom efforts to create attractive career opportunities for young people should be stepped up) with the diverse multidisciplinary skills they need to succeed. These initiatives must be systematically guided by approaches to RAS that ensure social inclusion and gender equality. This may require a rethinking of the traditional roles of RAS and associated capacities at individual, organisational, and enabling environment levels. Despite a risk of taking on too many responsibilities and an associated lack of focus, the increasingly demanding socio-economic realities in which young people live and work, as well as the ambitious 2030 Agenda, suggest that an evolution along these lines will be necessary.

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## Endnotes

- 1 Defined as “A network of organisations, enterprises and individuals focusing on bringing new products, new processes and new forms of organisations into social and economic use, together with the institutions and policies that affect their innovative behaviour and performance” (Hall *et al.* 2006). They include producer organisations; traders; micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises; service providers; large and small private investors; and public agencies.
- 2 “A territorial approach to development ... can be characterised by the development of a territory (including both areas that are ‘more rural’ and those that are ‘more urban’ in a defined region) by addressing the development of multiple sectors, implemented by a range of stakeholders and structured by multilevel governance – or governance that involves coordination and collaboration between local, regional and national level authorities and stakeholders” (Suttie and Hussein 2016: p. 4).





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