

The Eclectic Relation Between Jobs, Skills and Youth Migration

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How should organisations working to improve food security via employment and education programmes relate to the political agenda of mitigating (international) migration? This was discussed during a “Youth in food systems” community of practice meetup in Utrecht, the Netherlands.

Drivers of youth migration

Roughly one third of all international migrants are 15 to 34 years of age. The context for youth migration includes high youth unemployment rates in countries of origin. Lack of meaningful work contributes to frustration which can lead to social unrest or irregular migration (without authorisation or documents required under immigration regulations). Rural youth, especially, seem more likely to migrate in response to lack of decent employment or entrepreneurial opportunities in agriculture and related rural economic activities – though migration of rural youth is more often temporary and seasonal, and more often to urban areas in the region. Sustainable agricultural transformation, and in particular the creation of meaningful jobs, could offer opportunities for addressing several of the drivers of youth migration.

The migration paradox: economic development increases aspirations and capabilities

It is increasingly recognised that policies that help young people fulfil their potential can help drive economic development. It is popularly believed that this growth could prevent young people in particular from migrating internationally. The migration paradox, however, illustrates that economic development in poorer countries first leads to a strong *increase* in domestic, international and intercontinental migration. Although the complexity of interrelated factors driving migration makes it very difficult to accurately predict future migration dynamics, growing aspirations paired with growing capabilities (individually and as a result of family investments) do lead to growing migration – as Dietz describes on page 3.

Maximising positive and minimising negative migration effects on agricultural development

In funding agricultural programmes, donors increasingly focus on the assumed relation between youth employment, education and mitigating intercontinental migration, yet it remains difficult to demonstrate a direct effect of these programmes on migration decisions. Youth education and employment programmes might even contribute to more migration in the near future, but in the longer term could help reduce distress migration (forced choice) and steer

youth towards safer and more regular forms of migration. Vocational training and education can connect youth to local opportunities, but training is not enough, and integrated approaches are needed which consider job/business opportunities and other factors, such as social relations and climate change. Furthermore, low unemployment rates are not necessarily a sign of better youth labour market outcomes, as these might mask rates of underemployment or informal work. True reduction in distress migration requires a focus on creating decent jobs; crucial to this is a political enabling environment, policy interventions and regulations. Multi-stakeholder collaborations combining youth-specific programmes with youth mainstreaming efforts could increase the success of these endeavours.

Moreover, migration can also be viewed in terms of its positive effects. At destination, migrants can provide added value: extra labour force, different skill sets and new knowledge. Simultaneously, in countries of origin, migration can in some cases reduce pressure on natural resources and stimulate a more efficient allocation of labour. To harness the potential of migrants in agricultural development, these effects, and the role of remittances, should also be considered. Perhaps a shift in the framing of donor funding is needed: towards how organisations can contribute to maximising positive impacts of migration and minimising negative ones.

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Further reading

More on F&BKP thematic work on youth in agro-food systems: knowledge4food.net/theme/youth-agri-food/

Migration and agriculture. What do you need to know? www.fao.org/fao-stories/article/en/c/1072891/

Youth Employment in Developing Economies: Evidence on Policies and Interventions <http://bulletin.ids.ac.uk/idsbo/article/view/2867/ONLINE%20ARTICLE>

Migration, Agriculture and Rural Development. Addressing the root causes of migration and harnessing its potential for development. www.fao.org/3/I9549EN/i9549en.pdf