

Meeting a region's development needs

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, FAO, works to raise levels of nutrition, improve agricultural productivity and the lives of rural populations, and to contribute to the growth of the world economy. The Gender, Equity and Rural Employment Division (ESW) supports FAO's efforts to promote the economic and social well-being of the rural poor. To address the specific challenges faced by youth, this division initiated and has been following the Junior Farmer Field and Life Schools (JFFLS) approach since 2004. As seen in Palestine, the results can have a broad impact.

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The Junior Farmer Field and Life Schools (JFFLS) combine support to vocational educational training opportunities with employment promotion. They are a concrete manifestation of the increasing recognition of the linkages that exist between rural employment, poverty reduction and food security. The schools have a unique methodology and curriculum, providing agricultural, life and entrepreneurship skills in an experiential and participatory learning approach. There is also an employment-oriented component which encourages and helps JFFLS graduates to form Youth Farmers' Associations (YFAs), through which they can more easily access resources and place their produce in the markets.

A complete approach The JFFLS-YFA process is structured into 3 consecutive phases: a learning phase, an employment phase, and a market access phase. During the learning phase, FAO works closely with a country's Ministry of Education in formal schools, the Ministry of Youth (via youth clubs or vocational education training centres) and with the Ministry of Agriculture. During the employment phase, FAO works with the Ministry of Labour, farmers' associations and co-operatives and agri-business and marketing experts. Efforts are made to register associations, or to open youth branches within established farmers' co-operatives. This

enables the associations to register the land they use for farming under their own name. The third and last phase is the market access phase, during which FAO works closely with the Ministry of Trade and with rural finance and micro-credit institutions, aiming to connect the associations with potential lenders so as to allow them to expand their activities and production. In many countries, co-operation with the Ministries of Trade and Agriculture has helped the youth associations reach high quality standards in, for example, organic farming products.

The programme has been successfully introduced in several African countries as well as in the Middle East and Asia. The JFFLS-YFA have more recently been included as one of the main activities in the United Nations Joint Programmes for “Youth Employment and Migration” in Malawi, Mozambique and Sudan, as well as in the UN’s “Jobs for Peace” programme in Nepal. Field evaluations have shown that the JFFLS-YFA approach has been

helping develop the entre-preneurial and agricultural skills of the youth as well as their self-esteem, helping them become healthy and positive young adults.

Capacity building in Palestine

One of the most interesting applications of the JFFLS-YFA approach has been seen in the Palestinian territories (in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip). The situation in these territories has prevented the free flow of goods and services, and disrupted the stability needed for an orderly life. The further division of the West Bank into separated areas (as a result of the “Oslo Accords”) has contributed to the fragmentation of UN interventions and has been an impediment towards a holistic approach. Palestinian youth face a number of handicaps and disadvantages: a lack of rural employment opportunities; vulnerability to an increasingly tense crisis and the lack of appropriate agricultural training facilities.

Reduced access to land is increasing food insecurity among many households. Youths are particularly vulnerable to this as they need access to nutritious food in order to grow and develop. It is essential to invest in Palestinian youth in order to facilitate the evolution of a Palestinian state. The development of a youth workforce is one of the most important priorities and challenges towards a peaceful and prosperous society. Vocational training and employment opportunities are essential to allow the youth to make a contribution to promoting Palestinian national development. The main goal of the JFFLS-YFA approach in Palestine has been to build local capacities to meet the development needs and priorities of Palestinian youth, while responding to the need for sustainable environmental, economic and social development.

Two specifically trained facilitators (chosen among extension officers, teachers, social workers and/or farmers’ cooperatives members), used this participatory methodology to share agricultural knowledge and life and business skills with 15 girls and 15 boys in different schools. These 2 to 3 hour sessions were given twice a week; each taking place in the field after regular school hours. The learning programme lasts a school year and follows the crop cycle; participants are taught about the links between agriculture, nutrition, gender equality and life and business skills. The course not only teaches them how to grow healthy crops, but also how to make informed decisions for leading healthy lives. Local women’s associations were put in charge



of preparing and distributing meals for the students attending the lessons. The selected associations also benefited from trainings in good nutrition, health, agricultural value chains, entrepreneurship skills and on the fundamentals of the JFFLS approach.

Broader opportunities Since 2008, approximately 2,000 youth have been trained in the JFFLS approach in the West Bank and Gaza. They have subsequently been grouped into more than 20 youth farmers' associations, and become involved in activities that range from honey processing to

Students enjoy learning about agriculture

Basel Yousef is 15 years old and one of the students selected to participate in the Junior Field Farmer and Life Schools Programme. Basel is from Salem village, one of two villages in the school catchment area in the district of Nablus, in the northern part of the West Bank. The Der Al Hatab School has 600 students, aged 9 – 15. Basel enjoys learning how to work with the land at school as part of the JFFLS approach. He now knows the implications of seasonal changes for agriculture, how many days particular vegetables need to develop, when to water and irrigate the land, and the purpose of using fertilisers. Basel lives at home with his mother, 3 brothers and one sister, about 2 km from the school, and his family was enthusiastic about his involvement in JFFLS. Basel hopes to continue learning about agricultural practices in school and eventually go on to university.



horticulture and livestock. All the young farmers are full members of the associations and receive a share of the profits from their association.

One of the most successful examples of the employment phase comes from the Hebron district in the West Bank. Here, the JFFLS graduates came to join the Al-Shiva Hive Co-operative Society. The co-operative is renowned, nationally and internationally, for producing and exporting organic honey. The students were trained in the honey value chain and learned about agricultural value chains, beekeeping, maintaining bee hives and honey processing. They were given full membership of the Co-operative Society and share in the profits like all the other cooperative members.

Marketing exhibitions or “khayrat blady” are organised once a year in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and bring together all the associations involved (representing both women and youth). The exhibitions not only provide a concrete marketing opportunity, but also a chance to exchange ideas and skills among themselves. These events allow the associations to display and sell their goods (including breads, vegetables, cakes, cheeses, embroidery work, handicrafts and jewellery) and to develop short and long term contracts with different clients.

Throughout the process, FAO developed and maintained strong partnerships with several ministries, the Youth Development Association, and with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). These linkages have proved crucial in strengthening the capacities of the public administration and civil society. They have also been fundamental for the institutionalisation of the JFFLS approach and the entrenchment of mechanisms for addressing rural youth unemployment. The linkages between groups of JFFLS graduates, existing youth clubs, women's associations and local farmers' groups have proved essential to ensuring the continuation, replicability and sustainability of the activities.

There is a continuing discussion with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education about including agricultural lesson within the national curriculum, which the Ministry appears to favour. FAO's involvement led the Ministry of Youth to pilot agricultural lessons and the Palestinian Authority has now seen the benefit of this approach and opened a unilateral fund agreement with FAO to institutionalise this approach.

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