



# RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND FOOD SECURITY FORUM 2019 PROCEEDINGS

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DECEMBER 2020



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In this publication, “\$” refers to United States dollars.

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# Abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AWD	alternate wet and drying system
CIRAD	French Center for Research and Agricultural Development
CO <sub>2</sub>	carbon dioxide
DMC	developing member country
DSR	directly seeded rice
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FDI	foreign direct investment
FPC	farmer-producer company
FPO	farmer-producer organization
GDP	gross domestic product
GIS	geographic information system
GMS	Greater Mekong Subregion
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
ICT	information and communication technology
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute
IRDP	Integrated rural development program

IRRI	International Rice Research Institute
IT	information technology
KMUTT	King Mongkut University of Technology, Thonburi
LAO PDR	Lao People's Democratic Republic
NATCO	National Confederation of Cooperatives in the Philippines
NGO	nongovernment organization
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
O&M	operation and maintenance
OTOP	One Tambon One Product
PGP	Carrageenan plant promoter
PNRI	Philippine Nuclear Research Institute
PRC	People's Republic of China
PPP	public-private partnership
PSOD	Private Sector Operations Department
RDFS	Rural Development and Food Security
R&D	research and development
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SME	small and medium-sized enterprises
STEAM	Science and Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics
UK	United Kingdom
UNCDF	United Nations Capital Development Fund
US	United States
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WHO	World Health Organization



**The benefit of nurturing non cognitive skills.** Investing in the non cognitive skills of young farmers such as motivation, integrity, and interpersonal communication skills will boost their ability to help transform their communities.

# Voices from the Field: Youth Perspectives

**Y**outh and youth representatives were invited to share their views about farming and employment in rural areas. They shared their aspirations and experiences to explain (i) what hindrances they face in taking up farming fulltime, and (ii) what other nonfarm employment opportunities can be developed in the rural areas.

## Keynote Address

**Sara Savastano, Director, Research and Impact Assessment Division, International Fund for Agricultural Development**

Thank you for inviting IFAD to present the *Rural Development Report of 2019*,<sup>21</sup> which is on creating opportunities for rural youth. I am happy to see that four of the seven members of this panel today are women because the future of agriculture, I hope, belongs to everybody, including women. I would like to acknowledge the work of our Associate Vice President of Strategy and Knowledge Department at IFAD, Paul Winters together with Aslihan Arslan, Research and Impact Assessment Division, and Constanza Di Nucci, who have conducted this huge work of putting together 21 research papers that formed the background for writing this report. The work covers policies, advisories, and applied research and hope the content and key messages our report will be well taken.

<sup>21</sup> International Fund for Agricultural Development. 2019. [Creating Opportunities for Rural Youth: 2019 Rural Development Report](#).



**Supportive policies and partnering with the private sector.** Sara Savastano, Director of the Research and Impact Assessment Division, IFAD, encouraged the development of policies to support the rural youth in accessing land and finance.

## The Youth

Why youth? Because youth is a specific stage in human life. It is a critical moment and defines the transition from dependence to independence. It is also a time marked by critical decisions when, youth who are defined as being in the age group of 15–24 years make their own decisions and are empowered with the possibility to make those decisions. What does investing in youth mean? Investing in youth means the possibility to change the future generation. Why rural youth? Eighty per cent of youth aged between 15 and 24 years live in rural areas in developing countries. Most of them are in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. However, projections for the future foresee that by 2050 the percentage of youth living in rural areas will more than double in sub-Saharan while remaining the same or declining in Asia. The density equalizing map in my presentation reflects the percentage of youth in the global share of population. Today, the map shows a large share of the youth in Asia but if we look at the situation 30 years from now, the percentage of youth in Africa will increase tremendously. Therefore, we need to analyze and identify context, area, and country-specific policies to provide support to youth development.

Youth are central for rural development, as they are the foundation of success. For successful transition, young people need to become productive, connected, and empowered for their own future. There are three building blocks that we analyze for determining policies that impact youth development.

**Productive.** Why do youth have to be productive? Productivity is not only output per ha but is a proxy of many factors including in relation to quality of environment, the level of people skills and learning. But learning is not schooling anymore. The *World Bank Development Report of 2018*<sup>22</sup> has underscored the importance of noncognitive skills, which are more important than technical skills. Therefore, investing in noncognitive skills of rural youth is of fundamental importance. **Connected** means connected to market, to service, to ideas, and information. Being connected creates new opportunities for rural youth. Empowered of their own future, with power to make decisions in their best interest. **Empowering** does not only mean giving the right but also includes the possibility of exercising those rights. For example, access to land. It is not only the right to have land but the possibility to exercise the right.

The three dimensions we are taking into account are: (i) the macroeconomic context, which is the national setting basically creating the structure; (ii) rural opportunity space; (iii) household characteristics. Based on the characteristics of countries, specific policies will be suggested to invest in rural youth. In particular, in countries that have high structure and high transformation, agricultural opportunities are tremendous. However, in these countries, the share of youth is the lowest. Therefore, one needs to identify the best policy for that particular situation. In opposition to this, countries with low level of structure and low level of transformation are fragile states and conflict areas and countries where a majority of rural youth resides. In such situations, it is important to embed policies targeted at rural youth into the broader

<sup>22</sup> World Bank. 2019. [The World Bank Development Report 2018](#).



rural development context as the challenges are more related to structure and rural transformation.

### **Youth and the Rural Community**

Then we can look at the rural opportunity space. How do we move from the macroeconomic setting to the rural opportunity space? We looked at household characteristics in three regions of interest. We see on one side the level of commercialization potential, and on the other side is the agricultural potential, which reflects the microeconomic situation. In countries with high agricultural as well as commercialization, potential youth have diverse opportunities to invest in agriculture while in countries with medium and low commercialization potential, although with high agricultural potential, there is a strong limitation of market access for youth. We have to invest in increasing and strengthening access to market in order to be able to uplift the situation of rural youth.

The household characteristics where rural youth belong to mirrors the same situation; we distinguish four types of rural households: (i) transitioning rural households, (ii) diversified rural households, (iii) specialized farm households, and (iv) subsistence farm households. The same constraints we saw on the low-low category of countries we now can see in subsistence farm households. The large majority of rural youth is living either in transitioning households or fully transformed nonfarm households. For these categories of youth different types of policies are recommended. The large majority of youth, who are in transitioning households are engaged in off-farm opportunities.

The challenges that rural youth face are of four kinds: (i) capacity and skills, (ii) access to markets, (iii) access to land, and (iv) gender norms. They lack cognitive and noncognitive skills. Investing in youth will thus require investing in noncognitive abilities that are fundamental in an area of change in an era of structural and digital transformation of agriculture in order to be productive in the rural context. If access to finance is a constraint in rural areas, access to finance for rural youth is more difficult. Policies to support rural youth in accessing land and finance are of fundamental importance.

Regarding gender norms, women face triple challenges. They are female, young, and living in rural areas. They also face family pressure and social norms that make it difficult to identify appropriate policies for them. All these constraints are embedded in a broader context, which is underscored by high demographic change, challenges of climate change, gender resilience, and the digital revolution that creates and strengthens the divide between rural and urban populations.

This is more so true with rural youth. Vocational training, which was the policy followed in the past, is not sufficient anymore. Rural youth need cognitive and noncognitive skills. Noncognitive skills are equally as, if not more, important than cognitive abilities. Partnering with private sector is fundamental in an era where public funding is declining and support to agriculture by the international community is declining. Continuous support is needed to incubate ideas and finance start-ups.

Rural youth need to be empowered to participate in decision-making processes. Their participation helps to make interventions more responsive to their needs, increase their ownership and enhance their agency.

Investing in rural youth requires thinking differently and out of the box. The main messages from the report are:

- i. Rural investment policies for youth should be embedded in broader rural development context,
- ii. Strike the “right balance” between creating broader rural opportunities and fostering youth-specific ones, and
- iii. Policies and investments to foster rural transformation that is inclusive of youth and/or youth-centered need to consider the three foundations of rural development: productivity, connectivity, and agency.

There is no unique, single policy applicable to youth. The appropriate policy depends on the country, level of agricultural development, and the share of rural youth population in those countries. Low level of rural opportunity requires focusing on youth inclusion in the rural transformation policy and investment. High level of rural opportunity requires focusing on youth-specific policies and investments. In the least-transformed countries, reducing the fertility rate and improving farm productivity and the connectivity of rural areas are of central importance in addressing low productivity and a lack of agency. Countries with low levels of structural transformation but high levels of rural transformation share many characteristics with the least transformed countries. Thus, policy and investment priorities are similar, although the former group of countries may have more fiscal space for youth-specific interventions. Countries with high levels of structural transformation but limited extent of rural transformation have more room for youth-specific interventions. Highly transformed developing countries require the widest array of rural youth investments as they are the most diverse group in terms of their opportunity spaces.

## Panel Discussion

**William Lucht, Youth for Asia, NGO and Civil Society Center, ADB:** Thank you very much for the keynote address. Just a comment to start with. In Afghanistan, youth are considered to be in the age bracket 18–35 years. I liked your statement that youth have a cross-generational impact and that youth are heterogeneous.

**Fatima Moniz Soares, Coffee farmer, Timor-Leste:** Youth in Timor-Leste have many challenges to face as we have recently acquired independence. Youth are important as future generation, but they now have to take over where their parents have left off.

**Charlene Tan, Good Food Community, Philippines:** In the Good Food Community, we run a community-shared agriculture program to make people more than consumers by becoming a cooperative with the farmers, so that community members buy a share of the harvest and get whatever is fresh in the season. It is a way of

connecting with our farmers; a way of understanding what agriculture is like and a way to secure for the farmer a steady demand for goods. In a way, we support safe and nutritious food. I am not a farmer and I did not grow up on a farm. But I grew up with a sense of how things are failing and something new had to be done. I took up civil engineering because I wanted to work on appropriate technology with farmers and serve that sector. But there were not enough opportunities. I am a founder of the Good Food Community because that is what I wanted to do and after 8 years I now see many who also want to be in the sector and use their skills, not necessarily to become farmers, although many of us want to be close to nature. But we want to offer our skills to change to new systems; where we can be more connected in a sustainable manner. It will be good to see if we can make this a sustainable livelihood option.

In the course of our work, we have also seen use of purchase-guarantees, which were built slowly from ground up, with small volumes of produce. This is very accessible for women and they can take this up as they can work in their backyards. We have young farmers who can use cell phones, which was a great moment of rejoicing as orders could be placed via apps and farmers, especially youth, do take up positions of leadership. When we bring them to another farm to demonstrate, the learning effect is amazing as they see that more young people are applying the methods and systems and the youth farmers are part of a bigger system. Rural youth will increasingly take up opportunities if we get more support.

**Enzo Pinga, Earthbeat Farms, Philippines:** Like Charlene, I also do not have an agricultural background. My family is not into farming. I started Earthbeat Farms mainly because I saw the potential to have an impact on the countryside and the most marginalized section of the Philippine population, which are farmers and fishers. We started by growing specialty produce, high-quality produce promoting regenerative farming practices. Later, we moved toward connecting different farming groups and farmers linking them to markets in Manila. I felt that we had a better sense of what the demand was—rather than encouraging them to plant crops they are familiar with, then sell later to the middleman. We helped them with information on what our clients needed and encouraged farmers with the production and supply of produce in demand. In the past 2 days and from discussions in other panels we have seen that we cannot blame the youth for not wanting to enter agriculture.

Agriculture is high risk and in this current food system. I am speaking from my experience in the Philippine context. In our current food system, the ones that risk the most are rewarded the least. It is hard to convince young people to get into agriculture, which does not hold much promise. We have heard of different issues and problems from previous panels, so I think this would be good place to now come up with solutions. For me some of the quickest wins in the Philippines is having more market linkages. Some panelists addressed that yesterday, which is having more direct access to markets perhaps by using the model of contract farming and the distribution of goods. In the Philippines in the past we had a lot of produce and sometimes encountered overproduction and supply issues where the prices just dropped. We heard of such issues in the previous panel and I think it is not because there is too much of rice production or onions in the country. It is that in a particular

locality there is oversupply. It does not mean that other places in the Philippines have the same problem. Distribution is a key, critical success factor.

**Cherrys Abrigo, Sierreza, Philippines:** One thing that stuck in my mind from the keynote address is that there is no one policy that fits all rural areas or countries. In the Philippines we have a different setting. Opportunities are not readily available as we heard success stories yesterday from some other countries in Asia. One of the constraints is language. We cannot see beyond what is behind our food we eat. We may find our food delicious, but we do not think about the farmer who produced it and there is a disconnect. The farmers who produced the vegetables, poultry, meat or fish also do not see beyond the sale of their produce to the middleman and do not know what happens to their produce. They do not see the value of what they do.

In session 7, most of the farmer visitors here had translators because there is a language barrier—another gap. Even I cannot express myself clearly in another language. So how do we connect with all the technologies that we have here in urban communities, in developed countries, and share this with those in the rural communities. Sierreza is a very small enterprise that serves to bridge the gaps, as we see them. One of the motivations I have in doing my work is my immersion in the deepest of rural communities, particularly indigenous communities in the Philippines. After almost a decade of immersing myself, I slowly learned to understand them, what the real problems are. If one of us goes to the rural communities and asks about their problems, there is usually a default response because they do not know how to connect with us from the urban communities. Sierreza works on food and social media. We try to help the indigenous farming communities by training them to improve their livelihoods, walking them through technology, and marketing their produce. We transform and market their produce through our café where we transform the produce into something that can be understood by the urban communities—food that is familiar but with a story behind it. We tell the story in the store and café and in social media. It is a simple concept. We connect people through food and through social media. In future we can bridge the gap through the youth because the youth in urban areas are slowly learning about rural communities through initiatives like ours. The youth in rural areas learn in the same manner by connecting through us and those who are immersing themselves there. So hopefully, the initiative can be replicated in the Philippines and address a significant part of the problem.

**Christine Jodloman, Food Secure Philippines:** I grew up in a rural farming community in North Cotabato in Mindanao. I come from a family of farmers. The most important question I ask our partner farmers is: “Are you happy? Are you proud to be a farmer?” Most of them will say yes, we are because we do not have a choice.

Three years ago, 13 powered, young agripreneur leaders, who are children of farmers, established Food Secure Philippines. We exist because our current food system is devaluing what matters most, and that is people and planet. Our vision is a sustainable farm-to-fork lifestyle for everyone, where our farmers will have a sense of ownership of their products. Foodies like us will enjoy good food that is valued and fair, and our planet will not suffer because we care. We empower rural farming communities to be food secure, healthy, and business minded. Our main program

is the Agripreneurship Learning Camp and after camp activities for smallholder family farmers. Our area of operations is in North Cotabato in Mindanao and we have worked and are currently working with 300 farmers from indigenous peoples' communities. We have also built networks of share markets. Agriculture should be an inclusive and sustainable business ecosystem. Agriculture as a business opportunity should be magnified through a refresher lens. I want to share that in our farming communities, farmers usually joke that they know two English words: short and failure. Those two words refer to their harvest of palay and corn. They have been experiencing it so much that they joke about it. But for us, the younger generation, it should be a challenge and opportunity to see this not as a joke because it contributes to the biased narrative that agriculture is for the poor. We should look through a refresher lens at agriculture as a field of opportunities. To end let me say: farming is cool, smart, sexy and humane.

**Reginald Lee, Grow Asia, Singapore:** I represent Grow Asia. Our mandate is to improve smallholder profitability, productivity, and environmental sustainability by working with various sectors and farmers helping them to access markets, information, and finance. My background is in banking and finance and I made the transition to development work to make a useful contribution and I hear the same from some of my esteemed panelists hearing their stories. One defining characteristic of the importance of youth for the future is their openness, adoption of new ideas, innovation and technologies. That is the key ingredient if the youth are to become the future in farming. We covered Agritech this morning and in our agritech survey a lot of our founders are young, ambitious, and digitally savvy. You might know of Cropital in the Philippines (Ruel Amparo founded Cropital when he was 22 years). This openness to digital technologies is not limited to expensive high-tech solutions. Any improvement over current practices is seen as innovative, something the youth are willing to try, adopt, and change. They are open to improved seeds, tools, mechanized improvements, and biological controls. With proper training and guidance there is a role for youth to play in the future in terms of technology disseminators or incorporate it into their livelihoods or teach it to others.

**Amir Jilani, Young Professional, ADB:** We know that that many countries in South and Southeast Asia are experiencing rapid urbanization and rural young are looking for opportunities in urban areas. What incentives do you see for rural youth to stay engaged in agriculture and how should policy makers be responding to the lack of incentives and create a more enabling environment for young people to engage productively in rural farm and nonfarm economy?

**Sara Savastano, IFAD:** I would like to encourage all panelists to share with IFAD their success stories and case studies. The answer to all the problems can be traced back in agriculture economic history. We are in an era of strong agriculture digital revolution, and it seems that we have never faced one in the last 2 decades. A disruptive, technical revolution has taken place and creates the vision of a potential investment in agriculture wherein the youth could be the first beneficiaries as they are young, quick to learn, fast, and adaptive to technology and can be involved and engaged through social media. In the past and in a different context when tractors were introduced for the first time in agriculture, farmers did not want to use these

machines. But the young farmers caught on fast and started using tractors. Investing in agricultural technology at a time where agriculture is mainly labor-intensive, it is important to rely on the youth. While digital technology is internationally connected, areas within some countries may not be connected. It is thus important to link youth to the whole value chain and not just downstream to the consumers. The agri-food value chain and agriculture as a sector is still labor-intensive and most difficult to invest in. Given the right incentive to the right person can make an impact of revolutionizing agriculture into the digital age.

**Forum participant:** In the context in which panelists are working, what are some of the key and specific challenges that you have observed, some of the key takeaways of specific constraints young people are facing?

**William Lucht, Youth for Asia, NGO and Civil Society Center, ADB:** In our preliminary survey of farming youth in rural Tarlac in the Philippines, the majority grew the staple rice with some growing calamansi, mung beans, corn and chicama (potato bean). The youth indicated that they worked on the farm every day for 3.5 hours in the morning and spent some hours in the afternoons weeding, and approximately 4 hours bi-weekly to help monitor water pumps ensuring that crops are not drowned. In total, 43 hours every week were spent on agricultural work. Some general issues mentioned consisted of land security, especially in areas where farmers were evicted as a lot of these farmers are tenants and do not actually own the land; the plots of land being tilled are small, below 1.5 ha; and change in regulatory environment. The introduction of the RTL resulted in a drop in price for farmers from P22/kg to about P8–12/kg within 1 year. That is a loss of more than 50% of a rice farmer's income. The new legislation that prevents drying of rice on roads affected production. There is also the issue of financing, but groups interviewed mentioned the timely delivery of inputs by government. Sometimes advice provided is completely out of sync with the season or not the appropriate advice related to for example postharvest treatment. Furthermore, access to postharvest facilities is limited. In particular, youth find farming unprofitable, particularly in the context of growing climate change impacts and weather instability. It has made farming increasingly unstable in the face of the number and intensity of storms. In addition, youth mentioned that farming needs a lot of work in return for little reward. Although a lot of schools in the Philippines provide free tuition, the costs of transportation and rentals are high, and youth cannot afford to attend regularly. Youth had difficulties in stating the exact size of the farm while older farmers mentioned that youth had little contribution to the farm. This generally shows a disinterest of youth in farming although they did not explicitly negate it completely. In fact, youth already in farming indicated that they would continue with farming if they had opportunities of nonfarm paid employment as well.

For farming to be considered a worthwhile choice, they indicated a harvesting return of P50,000–80,000 a month (\$1,000–\$1,600), without which it is better to sell the land. We noticed similar responses in our follow up interviews with youth who had left farming. They mentioned instability and low return from farming as reasons for leaving. Overall, the five challenges that need to be addressed for retaining youth in farming are: (i) how to provide timely response support (extension) and inputs to farmers, (ii) how can farmer incomes and returns be increased reliably, (iii) how can



we reduce instability, (iv) how can we scale up their capacity, and (v) how can we increase their voice and participation.

**Fatima Moniz Soares, Coffee farmer, Timor-Leste::** Once I graduated from high school it was very difficult to find a job. In 2014 I followed up an advertisement for a barista position (person working in a coffee bar), which I secured. I worked for 5 years in a special coffee shop in Timor-Leste, which uses produce of local farmers. While working as barista we also faced problems in our coffee growing as customers wanted good quality coffee and we had to work very hard with farmers to produce good quality coffee. In 2016, ADB launched a project to establish a coffee association to increase quality of coffee. During this time, I used to work as a volunteer helping farmers to improve coffee quality in Timor-Leste. We approached the government for advice and support in producing coffee of an international, export quality. ADB recruited experts from Columbia to support coffee farmers in Timor-Leste. During training farmers and baristas worked together to improve production of good quality coffee. In 2017, we received expertise from Columbia, Australia, and Indonesia who shared their experience with us and learned how to link the farmers with the market. After working 5 years as an employee I set up in 2019 my own coffee shop on my farm (which is not a coffee farm) and processed coffee bought from farmers. I introduced these products to the market and contacted buyers. Although lacking financial means, farmers of Timor-Leste are not poor. They have potential. We can help farmers come out of poverty by developing their product and help them secure a good income from the produce. Youth are sometimes not taken seriously when they approach government agencies in Timor-Leste. The challenge that we face is bringing our good quality coffee to the market—convincing farmers as well as linking them to markets. My coffee shop has been in operation for 5 years and buyers have bought about 5 tons of coffee through our efforts this year. I feel happy that young people like me can help farmers to improve livelihoods and start coming out of poverty.

**Matthias Leitner, Young Professional, ADB:** I work on linking agriculture to the education sector. I am always impressed when meeting farmers as farming is indeed very knowledge intensive. Farmers need to be a soil scientist, an agronomist, a financial manager. It requires intense knowledge to do farming. Moving farmers from primary production further up the value chain requires more skills. They need business skills, and managerial skills, among others. How do we get those skills to the farmers? There are a couple of options we have: face-to-face interaction using FAO and IFAD field school models and strengthening extension workers. These are capital resource intensive. We also use tech-savvy youth and install remote learning systems. That is only one piece of the puzzle. I would also like to hear from the consumer side. In the end we need to embed knowledge of healthy diet into primary education. In the end, consumers are the ones who will demand and buy food. We need to raise the profile of good food and agriculture in the eyes and minds of the consumers. We need to tackle both the farming side and the consumers to get to producing, marketing, and consuming good food.

**Jules Hugot, Young Professional, ADB:** There is a broad consensus that productivity needs to increase to lift people out of poverty in rural areas. Apparently, the youth have special virtues, relative to the rest of the population, that are useful to increase

productivity. You all mentioned in one way or another innovation, and the ability of youth to grasp faster and implement new technology. By definition, youth have a longer time horizon and hence have a longer trial-and-error period. We need youth in agriculture. The problem seems to be that they are pushed out of agriculture while pull-factors toward urban areas are stronger—the relatively low profitability of farming contrasted with the attractiveness of cities in general. Land, which is an asset in farming, is expensive and often the youth do not have access to that type of an asset as opposed to working in the service sector, which does not require an initial investment. In that context I would like to know what have you seen in your experience in terms of public policies that support involvement of youth in agriculture, whether through dedicated education programs, legislation favorable to attracting the youth, or even targeted direct support program and subsidies? Is that something you have seen and is that something that could be part of the policy context?

**Charlene Tan, Good Food Community, Philippines:** I am not aware of particular policy that favors or targets the youth in the Philippines. I think that any policy that supports small businesses or helps improve family farming i.e., enabling as in my case, having a stand for organic food in every barangay, raises the level of my produce at the markets. When the farming family businesses make more money, everyone in the family business gets a role applying individual skills to carry out specialized tasks (social media, collections etc.). For entrepreneurs, the market context has changed and helped may be because of global attention to food and organic food, farm-to-fork, and chefs paying attention to quality and healthy food have helped make our proposition more valuable.

**Enzo Pinga, Earthbeat Farms, Philippines:** I concur with Charlene. I have not seen any national policy that targets the youth. Efforts to bring youth into farming or help them succeed in farming have emanated from the private sector. A lot of this comes in the form of mentorship or support network or companionship, like a community of young farmers talking with each other and bouncing ideas off each other. We have been actively trying to grow the food movement here in the Philippines, and from my perspective I can say that Filipinos do not value fresh produce as much as other countries. We still highly value imported goods and on our local fresh produce we do not put a fair value for farmers to survive and thrive. Thus, lot of our heirloom, indigenous products (fruits and vegetables) are disappearing as farmers see less value and return in caring for traditional products that have decreasing commercial interest from the market. That is where we have been trying to reverse this situation by promoting the food movement, making consumers more conscious about the variety of endemic produce, and to be more conscious about where their food comes from and what effort has gone into getting that food from farm-to-table.

**Reginald Lee, Grow Asia, Singapore:** I want to respond to the question about policies, for example the role of education policy. In Sara's slide on agricultural transformation, the general path is that as the share of agriculture in the GDP decreases, the share of population engaged in agriculture also decreases. The exodus is inevitable but the role of education is integral in helping to manage that transition for those that acquire better skills and capacity to secure nonfarm employment,



and for those that choose to stay behind—the point that Matthias made in terms of getting numeracy, critical business skills that enable them to manage their farms better.

**Cherrys Abrigo, Founder, Sierreza, Philippines:** Making consumers aware of an existing gap or disconnect between producers and consumers can be tackled by demonstrating to consumers the importance of this linkage. But who is supposed to demonstrate this to the consumers? Not a lot of people know both sides of the story so not a lot of people can demonstrate to consumers how we can be part of the solution. It is a collection of many issues but maybe as individuals we can encourage people to think outside the box, to go beyond their world. Our world is offices, salaries, business, all that relates to urban living and we have no idea what happens in rural communities. If we increase the exposure to actual windows of rural communities, then there will be more understanding of what happens, how hard it is to produce the food, how blessed we are with all endemic agricultural products. As consumers we do not appreciate because we do not see. Nowadays, those who show to the consumers the other side of the story are entrepreneurs like me. Maybe we have a lot of good policies but implementation and the connection of various policies with each other need to be worked on. We may need new policies, but we do need to integrate these with other existing policies. If we succeed in showing and convincing consumers the rural and farming side, how are we going to deal with those in power who are busy converting agricultural land to build urban infrastructure (malls, mega cities). Then there is nothing left to work on.

**Forum participant:** We teach people how to farm using natural farming techniques in communities and we are also trying to establish farms on vacant lots so that people with no prior access to technologies will be able to set up farms. I love what you have all been doing and for the past 3 days you are part of a pool of champions the world needs in terms of food security. We could agree that agriculture is the new dream. But I think only people with agency and access to information could say the same. The vast majority of farmers in the Philippines are subsistence or smallholder farmers, a part of whom are disinterested, have no agency, or are hungry and it is hard for them to make decisions and to think of agriculture as the new dream. In our work we encounter a lot of people, who are fairly well off, who are capable and have agency. With this in mind, people think of the youth as change agents. But people who are maintaining the status quo are not the youth. The ones who are making policies and running institutions are the ones who can distribute material and immaterial support. My question is directed to everyone in the panel: In relation to that, how do you think we will be able to encourage people without agency, people running small farms to think in the same way as we do? How do we find an entry point and think of agriculture as the new dream?

**Christine Jodloman, Food Secure Philippines:** We are working with rural farmers most of whom are, as you mentioned, subsistence family farmers. Many are aging and when asked about the youth they respond that they discouraged their children from becoming farmers as there is no future in farming. The best way to resolve this is through communication. We need a fresher lens and a fresher view that

sees agriculture in a more positive light. When we Google about agriculture in the Philippines or in the world, negative news will always be at the top. In communication, the agenda-setting theory describes the ability (of the news media) to influence the importance placed on the topics of the public agenda by covering a news item frequently and prominently, thus leading the audience to regard the issue as more important. Agriculture has become a negative narrative and it is a challenge to make the new narrative bringing agriculture into a positive light. We focus on success stories of technologies we have and are using, and we should focus on that.

**Sara Savastano, IFAD:** One of the panelists mentioned earlier the question they ask farmers: are you happy working in agriculture; and the answer is usually yes, they are happy, but they have no choice. When an activity is labor-intensive, it is difficult to wake up happy in the morning when an intense labor day starts. When smallholders lack assets, it is extremely difficult to give them hope. If farming is so tiring, time consuming, and engaging in physical activity smallholders will not see much positives in farming. We start with giving basic rights such as access to land, access to credit etc. but still the youth may not see the future in agriculture. In developed countries agriculture is important because it is part of the agri-food value chain; in developing countries agriculture is important because it is a form of subsistence. Policies and interventions should be targeted to improving the option, even if it is the only option. Success depends not only on cognitive skills but also on the personality of the people. Transforming a challenge into an opportunity cannot be done all by themselves. No matter how determined and strong we are in life to make agriculture the most beautiful thing on earth, we need policies and institutions. Once these are in place the private sector will accompany the public sector. IFAD is moving toward a concept called IFAD 2.0 – the Future, where there is not only the intervention of the public sector. Funds we receive from member countries are now being opened up for use by private sector. In future, private sector funding projects in agriculture may see an opportunity in investing in rural youth.

**Christine Jodloman, Food Secure Philippines:** The negative narrative of agriculture is perhaps embedded in our culture. Educating our children about the positives of agriculture is important.

**Forum participant:** At this moment we are talking about perspectives for youth in agriculture. I want to introduce senior citizens in agriculture. We interviewed some retirees and asked them what they wish to do after their retirement. Almost 80% of them want to have a farm. They want to produce their own food, which should be organic. They are looking at farming as a hobby but later, it becomes a business. The retirees have money, have experience, and probably wisdom. We have young ambitious people with aspiration of doing things differently. Is there any example where you can tandem youth with the senior citizens so that they start a business, which is quite different than what they are doing right now?

**Charlene Tan, Good Food Community, Philippines:** By virtue of working with farmers here we already have a number of senior citizens in farming. That is already

a given. It has been a great experience learning from them, especially indigenous folks, asking them about their knowledge and translating that to the wider audience has been meaningful. The more bridges we can build as social entrepreneurs, the more successful is our work. We have had retired NGO workers who have lived with farmers and then become community organizers. Retirement plans to become farmers or working with farming communities is a factor for success. But it is true that we need to dialogue properly to build up an appropriate place both for senior citizens and the youth.

**Forum participant:** I work in policy advocacy and consumer food safety, but I am here representing the Philippines for Natural Farming Inc. I know that sometimes we really need to start small somewhere. However, impact indicators are normally associated with economies of scale. I admire all of you and the work you are doing, and I have followed the work of some with great admiration. The farmer-consumer models shared by the panelists though were mostly targeting the high-to mid-end markets. That will only be producing for the tip of the food pyramid. Most of you are involved in marketing but Singapore has been targeting the total population. The demographics of both countries are different. My question is since you are producing for a small market, are there any ideas applied to uplift youth and a much wider section of the population in the agriculture sector? What incentives or drivers would likely help generate youth interest in going into novel marketing systems at broader scale? Any good news on the way forward?

**Enzo Pinga, Earthbeat Farms, Philippines:** In our case, like I mentioned earlier Filipinos do not put a high value on our agricultural produce. What we tried to do by getting the endemic varieties we partnered up with chefs, who created dishes and cuisine and we created something aspirational out of that produce. We hope that side of farming becomes cool and sexy. Given the constraints of land and other factors like access to market, we chose this approach—creating something aspirational with a produce we already have available in the Philippines. I agree with you that all good produce needs to be accessible to a wider group of consumers. But for us, those were the first steps we had to tackle.

**Forum participant:** I just want to share our childhood experience because when I mentioned to my grandparents that I want to become a farmer one day, they told me not to become a farmer because it is a hard life. The mindsets being formed in children direct them to go to college and work in the corporate world. I am from the private sector. The enacting of the RTL has downgraded the Philippine farmers by devaluing their produce. How can we, in such circumstances, increasingly persuade the youth, especially here in the Philippines to work in our rural areas? How can we change the cultural mindset of the young? The movies we are watching encourage people to migrate to large urban centers—everyone needs to go to Manila.

**Cherrys Abrigo, Sierreza, Philippines:** Our work is more than just marketing the produce and service a niche market. There is a huge problem in the mindset of the majority and as a result, agricultural products are undervalued. The organic vegetables we sell are not expensive. Most of our lives we have been fed this information that agriculture produce must be cheap. But organic produce requires one of the most

intensive labor and resource inputs and yet we expect the product to be cheap. We do not complain when we buy a P200 cup of coffee. We do not complain about buying consumer electronics. But we do complain about necessities of life, which is food. So, it will require a change of mindset, change in our thinking.

**Enzo Pinga, Earthbeat Farms, Philippines:** If we shift the approach and take the farm as an entity and see it as a business, it is not a bad idea for senior citizens to get into farming as they have access to finance and they have agency. If these farms become successful and as a business with access to finance and having agency already gives them a head start as compared to starting from scratch. If these farms are successful, it will prove to the younger people that you can make a good living out of farming. That is a way to attract younger people. Young people want to find meaning in their work and business is a big multiplier. Agricultural impact is probably the best meaning you could get.

**Sara Savastano, IFAD:** Based on the characteristics of countries that are more relevant for the ADB and the analysis that has been done through IFAD's *Rural Development Report*, I think the one message which sticks out as the most important one is that if we want to invest in youth, embed your youth policies into a broader set of rural development policies.



## Rural Development and Food Security Forum 2019 Proceedings

Smart rural development, effective agricultural policies, and efficient regulations are critical to ensure a sufficient, safe, nutritious, and affordable supply of food to Asia and the Pacific's growing population. Toward this end, the Asian Development Bank hosted the Rural Development and Food Security Forum 2019 to prompt governments in the region to provide the leadership and transformative change needed to generate rural prosperity and effective stewardship of land and water resources. Among the topics discussed were the farm income crisis, food insecurity and malnutrition, and rural distress and prosperity challenges. This report captures the stories and on-the-ground experiences of farmers, entrepreneurs and young agripreneurs to help prompt leaders to provide active leadership, effective resource stewardship, and promote transformative changes in rural development and food security.

### About the Asian Development Bank

ADB is committed to achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty. Established in 1966, it is owned by 68 members—49 from the region. Its main instruments for helping its developing member countries are policy dialogue, loans, equity investments, guarantees, grants, and technical assistance.



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