



SUMMARY FROM THE YOUTH & EMPLOYMENT ROUNDTABLE

May 17, 2016

Background

As part of a broader discussion on critical topics for food security and the global food system – such as climate change, urbanization, gender equality, and nutrition – Feed the Future hosted a series of roundtable discussions. These roundtables gathered a diverse set of expert participants for focused, small-group discussions about a potential path forward for a sustainable global food system in light of progress made in recent years, emerging issues, and the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda.

On May 17, 44 cross-sector experts convened in Washington, DC, for the Youth & Employment Roundtable. This document offers a brief summary of the roundtable discussions and highlights several key takeaways.

Discussion Summary

Setting the Stage: Why are Youth and Employment Issues Important for Food Security in Low-Income Countries? Governments in developing countries, international development partners, and NGOs are all seeking to better understand how to harness the energy and potential of youth in developing countries, particularly in strengthening the global food system and making it more sustainable and resilient. Poverty is also concentrated in rural areas, where the majority of people rely on agriculture for at least part of their livelihoods, supplemented by off-farm income. Participants explored whether achieving food security with a low environmental footprint may in some areas depend on making agriculture attractive to youth, often as part of a broader income diversification strategy. Participants stated that caution against overgeneralization is necessary due to great differences within and between Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean. Moreover, the needs of youth are diverse based on their gender, education and stage in their life cycle. Youth live and work in environments ranging from fragile and remote to high potential and well connected, impacting their resources and needs.

Implications of Demographic Trends and Migration Patterns on Youth and Employment: While population growth in most areas of the world is projected to slow markedly between 2015 and 2050, Sub-Saharan Africa's population over this period will double. About 60 percent of Africa's population is below the age of 25. The populations of Asia and Latin America are already stabilizing, and both regions are relatively advanced in their demographic transition. Sub-Saharan Africa is the only region of the world where the population of rural people, and rural youth in particular, will continue to grow past 2050. Migration of youth from rural areas to large cities and secondary towns is highly country- and location-specific. In parts of Africa, rural-to-rural rather than rural-to-urban migration is the dominant form of youth migration, though little comprehensive evidence is available to generalize. Youth migration is driven by both "push" and "pull" factors that either push youth out of rural areas due to lack of opportunities or pull them into urban areas in search of improved livelihoods. Participants noted that labor mobility is a means of enabling people to improve their opportunities.

Skills Required by Youth in Emerging Agro-Food Systems: Participants observed that youth will require a combination of technical skills, business skills and behavioral skills (problem solving, organizing and planning, working in teams, etc.) relevant to farming and the broader agro-food system. Participants

noted that training and skills development should be considered all along the value chain (not just in farming) and may include technical vocational education and training, private sector programs that infuse the needs of prospective employers and entrepreneurs into apprenticeships, lifelong learning programs, and improvements of the formal educational system, which was noted to be very weak in many rural areas, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa. Youth are very open to accessing various forms of information involving ICTs, which could speed innovation. Improving skills may help increase earning potential and improve health and wellbeing and vice versa.

Evolving Role of Agriculture in Expanding Youth Livelihoods: Agriculture is widely viewed as unattractive to youth, but to a large extent this may reflect historically low profitability in developing areas. Participants stated that the key to making agro-food system jobs more attractive to youth is to increase awareness of and improve access to profitable, year-round opportunities. This will probably require broader utilization of technology to replace manual labor. Many small farms will need to shift to higher-return activities such as fresh fruits and vegetables, dairy and other cash crops, which will require access to knowledge, capital and finance. There will be increasing opportunities for youth employment in value chains and food industries in most developing areas, particularly secondary and tertiary cities. Non-farm jobs are growing rapidly in all regions of the world, but the rate of growth of non-farm jobs is likely to depend importantly on multipliers from agro-food system growth in countries still in their early stages of development.

Participants discussed the importance of policies and the enabling environment in promoting youth livelihoods in the agro-food system and the broader economy. Access to finance, electricity, other forms of physical infrastructure and land are particularly important, especially in light of increasing land scarcity in densely populated areas.

Takeaways

The challenge and opportunity for the global community is to capitalize on expanding youth populations to achieve food security and energize economies. Youth are willing to experiment and innovate. Their potential roles and aspirations in shaping 21st century food systems are not yet fully understood. Participants stated that youth voices need to be heard in dialogues on their roles in agro-food system development strategies. Strengthening the competitiveness and efficiency of agro-food systems, improving the policy enabling environment, expanding their access to finance, and improving the education and skill sets of youth were widely acknowledged to represent the foundations of an effective strategy for achieving potential “youth dividends.” The participants noted that more experimentation and evidence are needed on effective approaches for engaging youth in agriculture and enhancing their contribution to broader post-2015 societal goals.

DISCLAIMER: This is a synopsis of the roundtable discussion conducted on May 17, 2016. It does not necessarily represent the views of the United States Agency for International Development, the United States Government, or of the individual participants of the roundtable event.