



FAO/19632/G. Bizzi/Arti

Rural youth: building a world without hunger

KEY FACTS

The ages 15 to 24 are used for all global statistics on youth.

During the decade from 2000 to 2010, the size of the youth population is expected to grow by 116 million, reaching almost 1.2 billion by the end of the decade.

About 130 million children of school age are not enrolled in primary school and 232 million are not enrolled in secondary school.

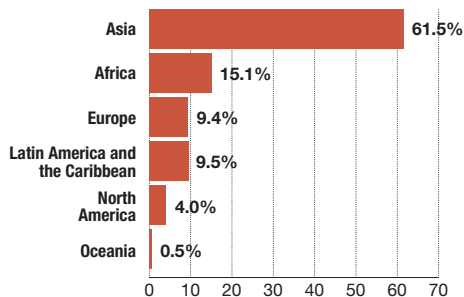
The International Labour Organization estimates that about 66 million young women and men are unemployed throughout the world.

Around the world, youth unemployment rose by 8 million between 1995 and 1999.

More than half of those newly infected with HIV are between the ages of 15 and 24.

By 2002, there were more than 13 million AIDS orphans, 95 percent of them in sub-Saharan Africa. By 2010, this number is expected to jump to more than 25 million.

Distribution of the world's youth population



Eighty-five percent of the world's youth population live in developing countries.

Source: United Nations, *World Population Prospects: The 2000 Revision*

In rural areas, where most of the world's food is produced, young people represent a deep pool of talent and energy that countries can draw from to reach their national development goals in sustainable agriculture, food security, health and nutrition. At the beginning of the new millennium, more than one billion of the people in the world were between the ages of 15 and 24. Eighty-five percent live in the developing world and more than half live in rural communities. But many young people are unable to realize their full potential because of hunger, poverty, poor health and limited opportunities for education and training.

Rural exodus puts farming at risk

Most young men and women in rural communities are involved in some aspect of food production, whether related to commercial agriculture or subsistence farming. For developing countries, a strong agricultural sector safeguards domestic food security and can serve as the cornerstone for long-term national economic growth. That is why it is essential that rural youth remain either actively engaged in farming or have other livelihood opportunities that allow them to contribute to the local economy.

Young people in rural communities, many of whom are involved in either subsistence farming or menial agricultural labour, are often lured to big cities by the prospect of more profitable work. But these prospects seldom work out. More than 70 million young people are unemployed throughout the world. In developing countries and countries in transition, national youth unemployment rates of over 30 percent are common.

Countries in the developed world are not immune either to the problem of high youth unemployment. For example, in Italy the youth unemployment rate currently stands at over 27 percent.

But employment statistics often do not tell the whole story. Many young people do not appear in official unemployment figures once they have given up looking for regular full-time work. For example, in Ghana less than 2 percent of the population are officially unemployed, but the rate of underemployment is almost 25 percent, much of it concentrated in the 15 to 24 age group.

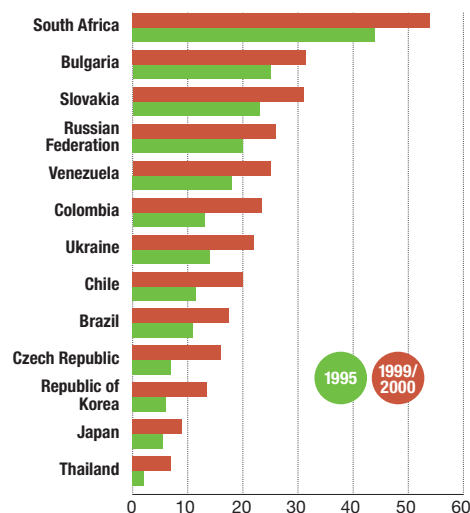
Many young men and women, unable to find formal employment, work in the "informal" sector, where pay is low, job security is limited, and protection against hazardous work conditions virtually non-existent. The informal sector accounts for 60 percent of the urban labour force in sub-Saharan Africa and more than 70 percent in India and Pakistan.

A new generation of farmer

In the small island state of Saint Lucia in the Caribbean, where the majority of the population is younger than 35, the average farmer is over 45. Young men and women have abandoned agriculture largely because of negative perceptions about farming life. During childhood, many children are given farm chores as a form of punishment, and they grow up viewing farming as an old-fashioned and backward occupation.

The Saint Lucia Ministry of Agriculture has launched a campaign to change the image of modern farming. The campaign stresses that today's farmer is no longer an old man in rags working long days with a machete and hoe, and that by learning modern farming methods and technology young men and women can establish interesting and profitable careers in agriculture.

Youth unemployment rates, selected countries



Countries in every region of the world are facing rising youth unemployment rates.

Source: ILO 2001, *Key Indicators of the Labour Market*

Education is the key

To earn a living and raise a healthy family, young men and women need education and training. But too many young people do not have a chance to learn the skills they need to lead healthy, productive lives. About 15 percent of the world's youth population, more than 153 million young people, cannot read or write. Most of these young people live in rural communities in developing countries and most of them are women. Worldwide, 96 million young women and 57 million young men are illiterate.

The disparity in education between young men and women begins at a very early age. In the developing world, two-thirds of the children without a primary education are girls. There is a clear relation between a young woman's education and later reproductive health, so closing this gender gap is literally a matter of life and death.

For young women, just four years of primary education have been shown to correspond to a 30 percent decrease in childbirths and to a 50 percent decrease in infant mortality rates.

Young people learn about life not only through formal schooling. Many skills that can enable young men and women to live safer, healthier and more productive lives can be effectively taught outside the classroom by community leaders. In rural communities in the developing world, which often lack adequate education and health care facilities, lessons delivered in non-formal settings can be especially valuable for young people. Because mothers have traditionally been responsible for passing their learning on to their children, it is extremely important that both women and men have access to non-formal education initiatives.

Rural youth and the AIDS crisis

The HIV/AIDS epidemic is one of the greatest health crises facing young people in developing countries. An estimated 11.8 million people aged 15 to 24 are living with HIV/AIDS, and every day nearly 6 000 more contract the disease. Many do not know how they have become infected.

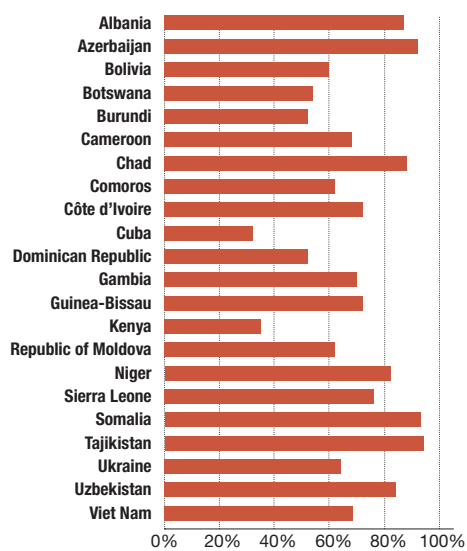
Young women are especially vulnerable: 7.3 million young women are living with HIV/AIDS, as opposed to 4.5 million young men. In some countries of sub-Saharan Africa, home to more than 70 percent of young people living with HIV/AIDS, the rate of infection among young women 15 to 19 years old is 5 to 6 times higher than that of young men.

Although HIV/AIDS statistics are not broken down into urban and rural areas, it is reasonable to infer from population data that the majority of the world's HIV/AIDS-affected people live in rural areas. In sub-Saharan Africa, more than two-thirds of the population of the 25 most affected African countries live in the countryside. The epidemic is undoing decades of economic and social development and seriously undermining food security. Unless young men and women learn about HIV/AIDS and safe sex practices, many rural communities will disintegrate entirely.

So far the disease has taken its greatest toll in sub-Saharan Africa, but unless young people learn how to protect themselves, the epidemic will explode in other developing countries.

Young men and women are not just victims of HIV/AIDS, but they are also the key to preventing the spread of the disease. One of the most important lessons that has been learned over the past 20 years is that if HIV/AIDS prevention and care programmes are to be effective, young people must be involved in their design and implementation.

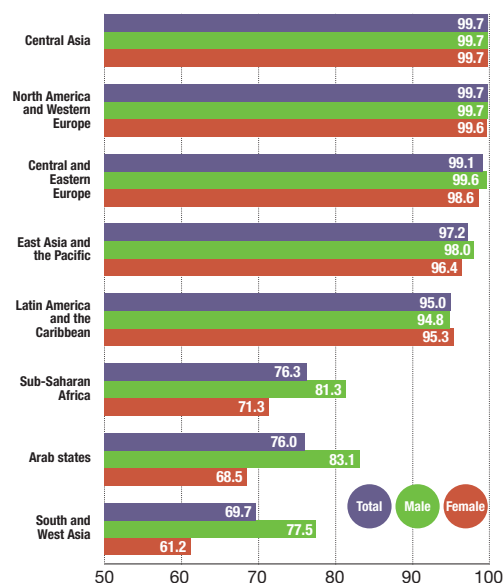
Proportion of young people who have never heard about AIDS or who do not know that HIV cannot be transmitted through mosquitoes



Ignorance about HIV/AIDS is putting many young people at risk.

Source: UNICEF 2000, Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys

Literacy rates among youth aged 15–24 in 2002



Regions with the lowest youth literacy rates also have the greatest gender disparity in literacy.

Source: UNESCO, EFA Global Monitoring Report 2002

Youth leading the fight against HIV/AIDS

In the run-up to the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS in 2001, UNAIDS published *Together we can*. The report highlighted success stories in which young people took a leading role in the fight against AIDS. Here are some examples.

- ▶ At Bharitya Vidya Bhawan, a coeducational school in Kerala, India, students designed and launched a peer education and counselling programme about HIV/AIDS. Their curriculum has proved so effective that they were asked to help develop similar frameworks for state education departments.
- ▶ *Straight Talk*, a monthly HIV/AIDS awareness newsletter in Uganda, has grown into the country's leading sexual and reproductive health information medium for adolescents. It has succeeded by addressing the issues that most affect young people and by using a language they can relate to.
- ▶ The Mathare Youth Sports Association focused its efforts on HIV/AIDS prevention when the epidemic began sweeping through Mathare, Nairobi's biggest slum. Senior players on its football team were trained as peer educators, and football fields became the sites for HIV/AIDS prevention campaigns.



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