

Decent rural employment for food security: A case for action

Creating new jobs in rural areas and upgrading the quality of existing ones should be a core aspect of any agriculture and rural development strategy to address the global hunger challenge.

Decent rural employment (DRE) is essential for sustainably increasing agricultural productivity and improving access to food for the rural poor.

Women and men who live in poverty generally rely on income from their labour, because it is often the only asset they have. If this income is sourced from secure working arrangements, households will gain in consumption stability and quality of life. In the long term, this can

enable them to invest in better education, health and nutrition.

Only employment which is decent can represent a powerful driver for long-term food security, reduced inequalities and sustainable growth. Jobs have to empower people and provide equal opportunities to all regardless of gender, age or ethnicity. They have to guarantee labour rights, such as freedom of association, as well as ensure decent levels of income and contribute to the realization and enjoyment of all human rights. Jobs must also provide a safe and healthy working environment, as well as social protection.

This *Case for Action* argues that promoting decent employment in rural areas represents a sustainable approach to achieving food security. It does so by highlighting the positive implications of DRE along all four dimensions of food security, namely: *availability, access, utilization and stability*.



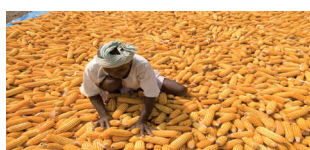
Key facts:

- Nearly 8 out of every 10 working poor live in rural areas.¹
- Less than 20 percent of agricultural workers have access to basic social protection.²
- Farming in Africa and Asia rarely generates more than US\$750 per worker a year.³
- Female wage workers in rural areas are more likely to hold informal, part-time, seasonal and/or low-paying jobs.⁴
- Due to lack of incentives and drudgery of rural life, youth are increasingly turning their backs on agriculture.⁵
- 60 percent of child labour is in agriculture.⁶

For more information, download the full publication:

www.fao.org/docrep/015/i2750e/i2750e00.pdf

Decent rural employment plays a critical role in addressing the four dimensions of food security



Increased agricultural productivity and domestic production

- Supporting small-scale agriculture and producers' organizations
- Promoting a more skilled and organized agricultural workforce
- Closing the gender gap in agriculture
- Facilitating youth participation and innovation in agriculture

**INCREASED
AVAILABILITY OF FOOD**



Increased incomes derived from labour for men, women and youth

- Increasing access to better paid employment opportunities in rural areas
- Improving working conditions and avoiding exploitative arrangements
- Facilitating access of women and youth to more qualified rural jobs

**INCREASED
ACCESS TO FOOD**



Improved health, income and time for preparation of higher quality food

- Increasing the purchasing power of poor households to afford adequate and diversified diets
- Reducing hazardous activities and exposure to poor health and safety conditions
- Improving the balance between productive and reproductive work

**IMPROVED
FOOD UTILIZATION**



More investments in health and education, greater livelihood resilience

- Increasing access to gainful and stable jobs
- Supporting diversification and access to high-return non-farm employment opportunities
- Extending access to social protection in rural areas

**IMPROVED
STABILITY**

Making sure that both women and men have access to decent employment opportunities in rural areas is one of the greatest challenges faced by governments and development partners today.

Given its mandate to reduce rural poverty, raise levels of food security, improve agricultural productivity and better the lives of rural populations, FAO has a significant responsibility in actively promoting DRE. It also has a crucial comparative advantage, specifically with respect to decent work in the agriculture sector,

including: livestock, forestry, fisheries and management of natural resources, as well as agroprocessing and retailing.

To be successful, a strategic and holistic approach is needed to leverage the potential of DRE for reducing poverty and achieving food security. FAO has identified four priority themes for expanding its work on DRE; these are based on the current challenges in rural labour markets, while also taking into consideration FAO's core functions, comparative advantage and its work to date on this issue.

Opportunities for expanding FAO's engagement in promoting decent rural employment

1. Promoting employment-centred and responsible agro-investments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promoting social analysis for responsible agricultural investments Closing the gender gap in agriculture Upgrading rural education and vocational training, with a special eye on the different needs of rural women and men, youth and adults Fostering socially and environmentally sustainable business models
2. Supporting gender and age disaggregated analysis of rural labour markets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reaching a deeper insight into the complexity of rural labour markets, especially its informal segments Analyzing employment patterns in processes of rural transformation Enhancing the production and use of sex and age disaggregated agricultural data that includes socio-economic information
3. Promoting decent work conditions towards more socially sustainable agricultural production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preventing and reducing child labour in agriculture and supporting the enforcement of international labour standards in rural areas Strengthening occupational safety and health Extending social protection to small-scale producers and vulnerable rural workers Supporting the collective organization of the rural workforce
4. Promoting employment-enhancing strategies and programmes for disaster risk reduction and emergencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promoting more and better jobs as integral part of initiatives to build resilience Promoting DRE to contribute to mitigation and adaptation to climate change and to the sustainable management of natural resources Integrating DRE concerns into emergency interventions and disaster recovery programmes

FAO has renewed its commitment to promoting DRE in its revised Strategic Framework. In particular, DRE is featured as the Organizational Outcome on “*The enabling environment in member countries is created or improved to increase access by the rural poor to decent farm and non-farm employment*” under the new Strategic Objective “*Reduce rural poverty*” (SO3).

FAO seeks to address decent work challenges through normative work, including better outreach of international labour standards to rural areas; policy advice at country level on DRE through technical support and capacity development; as well as diagnostics of the DRE situation through information and analysis on rural labour markets. In pursuing this objective, FAO seeks to strengthen existing partnerships, in particular with the ILO.

Endnotes

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- FAO, IFAD, ILO (2010), *Gender and Rural Employment Policy Brief. Issues 1 to 7*, FAO, Rome.
- IFAD (2011), *Feeding future*

generations – *Young rural people today, prosperous farmers tomorrow*, Plenary panel discussion, 34th session of the Governing Council, Rome.

- ILO (2010), *Accelerating action against child labour*, Report of the Director-General,

International Labour Conference, 99th Session, Geneva.

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