

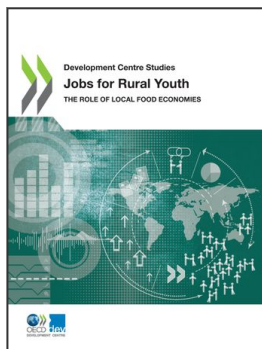
Foreword

Rural youth today constitute the majority of the youth population in many developing countries. Most of them are engaged in subsistence farming and struggle to find better-paying jobs to escape poverty. It is becoming increasingly clear that rural youth are turning their backs on subsistence agriculture and aspire to better jobs elsewhere. Potential job opportunities for rural youth exist, however. Growing populations, urbanisation and rising incomes of the working class are increasing domestic demand for more diverse and value-added agricultural and food products in Africa and developing Asia. This rise in domestic food demand could boost job creation in the food economy if local food systems were mobilised to take up the challenge of higher and changing domestic demand for food. An important question, therefore, is how governments could make local food economies more vibrant so that they create a real market demand for local producers and all actors along the agri-food value chain.

This study places rural youth employment in developing countries at the centre of the analysis. It aims to sharpen our understanding of the challenges associated with current food systems in terms of decent job creation and environmental footprint and to explore which food production and distribution models are more likely to ensure not only economic gains but also social and environmental benefits. A key message is that integrating rural youth into productive and environmentally sustainable agri-food activities rooted in inclusive domestic food systems may well be one of the few lasting solutions to the current rural youth employment challenge. For this to happen, actions need to be taken today.

The findings contribute to the work of the OECD Development Centre on building more cohesive societies and helping countries to identify emerging issues and find innovative solutions to address social challenges. The research was undertaken with financial support from the European Union to provide evidence for the policy dialogue on youth well-being in developing and emerging countries. It is based on the analysis of data from selected developing countries in Africa and Asia, as well as a review of different local food models across the world.

This work adds to the policy dialogue on rural youth employment in three essential ways. First, it constitutes an important effort to understand the structure of youth employment in the different segments of the food economy as well as the employment growth potential in the food economy under current food models at horizon 2030. Second, it takes stock of a number of local food systems and short food supply chain models commonly found in developed countries that reconcile economic, social and environmental objectives. Finally, it discusses the replicability of such models in the context of developing countries and proposes some policy directions that will be needed to harness the potential of rural youth through vibrant, sustainable and inclusive domestic food systems anchored in local and regional value chains. We hope that this study will stimulate discussion among development stakeholders to bring about environmentally sustainable food systems that contribute to food security and work for the large number of rural youth in developing countries.



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