

Youth matters – stemming the drain

For a variety of reasons, young people increasingly leave their rural homes. This drives the further destabilisation and impoverishment of rural areas. The article presents three approaches towards reversing the trend: the delivery of youth services, participation in community decision-making and the facilitation of youth entrepreneurship.

Young people (the United Nations defines “young people” as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years) constitute approximately 20 percent of developing countries’ populations (UN World Youth Report 2007) and as such are a strong demographic force. With a higher educational standard than the older generation and their interest in as well as knowledge of global trends and the new media, they have great potential and are vital in ensuring the viability of rural areas.

■ Why young people leave their homes

Yet for a number of reasons young people are increasingly forced to leave their villages and move to urban areas. Of course, humanitarian crises due to internal conflict or natural disasters are one major cause. However, many young people are pushed to leave by other factors: poor job prospects, the

lack or inadequacy of fundamental services and growing rural impoverishment. Also, many young people lack access to decent work opportunities, land or microcredit and therefore cannot achieve economic independence. This is combined, especially in Africa, with an increasing burden of taking on responsibilities prematurely in the wake of the HIV/Aids pandemic. Moreover, young people may be forced by their parents to move to cities for work or to support relatives. Finally, traditional age-related authority structures still characterise life in many rural areas, excluding young people from decision-making processes in their communities. These circumstances often lead to frustration and a perceived lack of future prospects among young people. In contrast, urban areas seem to offer vast opportunities for fulfilling young people’s aspirations through access to better education, more varied employment prospects and a way of life informed by globalised media culture.

■ Britt Kalla and Tina Silbernagl

Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) Sector Project “Implementation of Children and Youth Rights” Eschborn, Germany
youth@gtz.de

■ Migration and its challenges

Over the last decades worldwide migration has increased exponentially, with movement from rural to urban areas being predominant. In many countries young people constitute a

large proportion of these migrants. In Paraguay, for example, 12.7 percent of people between the ages of 20 and 24 are internal migrants. Similarly, urbanisation rates are rising in all of the Pacific Island States, with the Solomon Islands exhibiting an annual growth rate of 6.2 percent (UN World Youth Report 2007). Young people are now under-represented in rural areas and over-represented in urban areas. Such a development has serious consequences – for the communities left behind, the urban areas affected and, of course, for young people themselves.

When young people leave their villages, an energetic workforce is lost. Moreover, rural communities lose those with the greatest transformative potential. This destabilises village economies, impacts on food security and worsens the disintegration of traditional support structures. It also causes youth-focused government services to be discontinued. Urban areas, on the other hand, are not equipped to absorb the high inflow of rural youth. Housing is often inadequate and sanitation facilities insufficient. The growth of slums is



a consequence. In Sierra Leone, Chad and Sudan, for instance, more than 90 percent of the urban populations live in slums (UN Habitat). In the end young people rarely find the life in the city they had hoped for. Missing family support structures leave them socially excluded. Underemployment in the informal economy makes them vulnerable to poverty and exploitation. Moreover, those living with extended family members are often prone to being physically or sexually abused. This potentially increases young people's anger and despair, which can result in a proliferation of youth violence and their mobilisation for political upheavals, armed violence or terrorism.

■ How to make rural areas attractive for young people

Life in rural areas can be made more attractive for young people. This article looks at three possible approaches: the delivery of youth services, participation in community decision-making and the facilitation of youth entrepreneurship.

Improving young people's lives through the delivery of youth services. Many developing countries' rural areas lack governmental and non-governmental structures ensuring the rights of young people. At the national level there is often a ministry responsible for the realisation of the rights of young people, but in most cases it is comparatively weak and insufficiently resourced. As a result, existing legal frameworks are seldom implemented and decentralised service provision is either of poor quality or does not exist at all. The situation is often similar for non-governmental organisations (NGOs). However, well-functioning youth services, especially at municipal and community level, are vital to ensuring that young people's needs are considered and their positive potential developed.

Decentralised youth services include a variety of aspects. At best there is a local youth officer, a professional youth social worker employed by the municipality. The officer has a mediatory function between the local administration and young people or youth organisations and is responsible for representing young people's interests. The officer facilitates the participatory development of local youth policies and action plans. These set out how youth issues can be adequately addressed by a variety of actors, including young people themselves and, as appropriate, village chiefs, agricultural extension workers, the private sector and the police. Furthermore, youth officers have a supervisory function for the implementation of

initiatives which include the establishment of youth resource centres and the implementation of mobile youth services. These provide young people with access to information and the opportunity to engage in global issues via the Internet. They also support the formation of youth groups for entrepreneurship or leisure purposes.

Capacity development is one central approach through which to develop such sustainable structures for youth promotion and has been carried out on all continents by German development cooperation. Its aim is to build capabilities at individual, organisational and societal level. As regards the youth sector, capacity development means providing comprehensive support for partner countries in their efforts to establish or further develop state and non-state youth structures on all levels – micro, meso and macro. In addition, it includes building the capacities of the people working within all these institutions, be it ministerial staff, local youth officers or youth social workers. Finally, it entails supporting the development of youth-specific policies and ensuring sufficient resource allocation to the sector. The ultimate goal is to have a recognised and functioning youth sector through which the rights of young people are protected and promoted across all other sectors.

Enhancing social inclusion through youth participation in community decision-making. In rural areas traditional age-related authority structures remain dominant. Elders are an absolute authority within the village, whilst young people are allocated a marginal role until they can establish themselves as economically independent heads of households. Young people are not included in decision-making processes, but are frequently required to implement these. Traditionally the transition process from youth to adulthood was accomplished, for example, through rites of transition or the attainment of economic independence. However, this is no longer



Photo: GTZ Peru
To keep young people in rural areas they need to be integrated in community decision-making processes.



Photo: J. Boethling

Youth-specific programmes must be designed that combine training in business skills with mentoring and access to financial services.

Through such initiatives young people and youth organisations are enabled to take a stronger role in their communities and ensure that their needs are met by state and non-state actors. Accompanying measures should ensure that the capacities of young people for these processes are built and that resources are earmarked accordingly. Ideally, the local youth officer plays a significant role in mediating such processes and young people from a variety of backgrounds are included. If a rural community wants its young people to feel valued and to become responsible citizens, participation is key.

possible, owing to economic decline, the effects of HIV/Aids and armed conflicts. At the same time access to global media and youth culture combined with educational achievement means that young people increasingly question age-related hierarchies.

Therefore the development of opportunities for youth participation within the community is vital to keeping young people in rural areas. This may involve the inclusion of young people in participatory appraisals, the participatory development of local youth action plans and young people's representation in adult decision-making bodies.

Ensuring economic inclusion through youth entrepreneurship.

Gainful employment and secure livelihoods are vital factors for the inclusion of young people in society. Yet the statistics show that young people are doubly disadvantaged; if they are self-employed, they are most likely to work as an unpaid family worker; if they are employees, they are most likely to have only casual contracts (GTZ 2005). In addition, traditional authority structures prevent young people from accessing land or financial services such as microcredit. Yet, in a state of high unemployment and increasing poverty in rural areas, the

facilitation of youth entrepreneurship is an essential path towards sustainable livelihoods and promising futures for young people.

Supporting entrepreneurial spirit transforms young job-seekers into job-makers. However, young people often lack the experience to start their own business and have no access to start-up capital. Therefore youth-specific programmes must be designed, combining training in business skills with intensive mentoring and access to financial services. Apart from the direct benefits, secondary benefits include enhanced self-confidence, autonomy and a stronger role within local communities. Furthermore, the expansion of young people's opportunities beyond small-scale farming provides incentives to remain in rural areas. Agro-based food processing, transport and the creation of youth cooperatives are proven strategies.

From 2000 to 2004 German development cooperation in Venezuela supported employment-oriented and community-based youth promotion measures. These included microcredits for young entrepreneurs and were carried out by the relevant ministries, by selected local authorities and by NGOs. In the space of a year 3,000 young people took part in training and were provided with more than 500 loans. Through careful selection, preparation and supervision, repayment quotas among the young borrowers were higher than those for adults. 260 new jobs were created and only two loans were not repaid.

Zusammenfassung

Junge Menschen sind für die Stabilität und Entwicklung ländlicher Räume unerlässlich. Mit einem Anteil von rund 20 Prozent an der Gesamtbevölkerung stellen sie in den Entwicklungsländern eine bedeutende Gruppe mit enormem Potenzial dar. Doch verlassen immer mehr junge Menschen ihre ländliche Heimat – aus den verschiedensten Gründen. Soll dieser Trend umgekehrt werden, müssen Anreize her, die das Dorfleben für die Jugend wieder attraktiv machen. Der

Beitrag beleuchtet verschiedene mögliche Ansätze: Angebote und Dienstleistungen speziell für Jugendliche, ihre Teilnahme an Entscheidungsprozessen innerhalb der Dorfgemeinschaft sowie eine auf junge Menschen zugeschnittene Förderung des Unternehmertums.

Resumen

La presencia de personas jóvenes en las áreas rurales es vital para la estabilización y el desarrollo de estas regiones. Conforman aproximadamente el 20 por ciento de las

poblaciones de los países en desarrollo, y por lo tanto representan un grupo numeroso con un gran potencial. Sin embargo, debido a muchas razones, las personas jóvenes crecientemente abandonan sus lugares de origen en las áreas rurales. Si queremos revertir esta tendencia, es necesario ofrecerles incentivos atractivos. Este artículo examina tres posibles enfoques: la oferta de servicios para jóvenes, la participación en la toma de decisiones en sus comunidades y la expansión del empresario juvenil.