THE FUTURE OF WORK – RESEARCH EXCERPT

Oxfam's Empower Youth for Work program commissioned the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) to conduct the research on 'The Future of Work'. IDS set out to answer the following questions, with a focus on LMICs in general and on the four EYW program countries in particular:

1. *What are the expected changes in work and income-generating activities for young people in rural areas?*
2. *Do existing policies anticipate the future of work?*

This is an excerpt of their full research report.
Authors: Dr Becky Faith, Justin Flynn, Kevin Hernandez and Dr Tony Roberts

---

Empower Youth for Work (EYW) helps young people (especially young women) in climate change affected areas of rural Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia and Ethiopia to access decent work. Oxfam has identified four 'megatrends' which are shaping the future, including rural youths' future livelihoods.[i] These trends are playing out in different ways across rural areas of the four EYW countries.

1. **Technological change:** In some countries, automation is threatening livelihoods and closing down traditional paths to rural development. Whilst digitization offers new opportunities for employment, women are often left behind. In Pakistan, for example, 37% of men use a smartphone compared to only 20% of women.[ii] People in rural areas often struggle with poor infrastructure and the high costs of connection.

2. **Demographic change:** One out of every six people on the planet is aged between 15 and 24, and most of these young people – almost one billion of them – live in developing countries. In the 47 least developed countries, the number of adolescents and youth aged 15-24 is projected to grow from 207 million in 2019 to 336 million in 2050.[iii] By 2050, the number of rural youth in Africa is expected to nearly double, to 180 million, while in Asia the number is expected to drop, from 340 to 230 million.[iv]

3. **Environmental pressures**: Rural youth typically work in sectors which are especially vulnerable to the effects of climate change, such as agriculture.[v] Climate change will have a major impact on the four EYW countries. Bangladesh is one of the most climate-vulnerable countries in the world and is highly susceptible to agricultural damage,[vi] while Indonesians in rural areas are reliant on climate-sensitive agriculture and fisheries.[vii] Ethiopia is overwhelmingly dependent on rain-fed agriculture and is hit by drought with increasing regularity,[viii] and Pakistan is highly vulnerable to climate change, with changes in rainfall patterns, droughts and floods already evident.[ix]

4. **Shifting power:** NGOs face a challenging environment, where only 3% of the world's population now live in countries with open civic space.[x] This threatens progress towards reducing inequality, since it is often marginalized and deprived groupswhom civil society seeks to empower and protect.[xi] For the EYW countries, this is particularly challenging. Civic space is classed as 'repressed' in Ethiopia, Pakistan and Bangladesh, and 'obstructed' in Indonesia.[xii] In response, young people have made creative use of mobile tools to create new openings for civic space online, in which they exercise freedom of expression and association. For example, youth movements and smallholders in Ethiopia organized online to contest government land grabs for industrial agriculture, using mobile phones and social media. [xiii] However, online civic space is also threatened by internet shutdowns, digital surveillance and coordinated disinformation campaigns.

These trends risk increasing the inequalities young people already face – the economic and gender inequality that affect their life chances and the nature of work available to them.[xiv] Youth are three times more likely to be unemployed than adults;[xv] and irregular work and a lack of formal employment and social protection leads to working poverty, which affects as many as 169 million young people globally.[xvi] Some 19% of rural youth have never attended school, and 48% have only completed primary school.[xvii] Rural young women face triple and overlapping discrimination on the basis of their gender, rural location and age. Women's disproportionate responsibility for care work perpetuates gender and economic inequalities. For example, in Ethiopia, women spend 291 minutes a day on unpaid care work compared to 125 minutes for men; in Pakistan, the figure is 287 minutes for women and just 28 minutes for men.[xviii]

Social protection programs such as cash transfer programs can reduce poverty and tackle inequality.[xix] In Ethiopia, the 'Productive Safety Net Program' (PSNP) supports eight million people and the government has pledged to invest 2-3% of GDP in social protection, while in Pakistan the new 'Ehsaas' program aims to establish a safety net for at least 10 million families.

THE FUTURE OF WORK IN EYW COUNTRIES

The majority of rural youth rely on precarious, seasonal, unpredictable, low-income and low-status smallholding subsistence agriculture. The unpredictability of globalized markets for farm produce and the impacts of climate change and industrial farming is making smallholder farming less attractive over time, and even young people with land are increasingly disinclined to take up farming. However, few other employment opportunities exist in rural areas, so migration to urban areas and foreign countries is seen as a more attractive option. NGOs and governments need to advocate for investment in rural locations and for other affirmative actions to benefit those most likely to be left behind.

'Greening' local rural economies through more sustainable agricultural, forestry, fishery, mining and tourism practices can help to ensure that rural youth will be able to continue to depend on the environment and natural resources in the future. The majority of the 1.5 billion people without access to electricity live in rural areas, so the production and supply of renewable electricity may be a large untapped market capable of employing many rural youth. Multinationals could play an important role in both helping to tackle rural youth unemployment through making their value chains more inclusive, and helping to create green jobs by making their operations more sustainable.[xx]

In some EYW countries, digitization is offering new opportunities for employment through online freelance work, microtasking and the gig economy. Yet this work is often out of the reach of many rural youth, particularly rural young women: people employed in microtask tend to be well-educated, male, older and urban. The on-demand services platform Gojek in Indonesia requires at least a lower-secondary education, and 83% of Gojek drivers in a recent survey[xxi] had completed upper-secondary education. Online workers work in more precarious conditions and often remain invisible to governments, making it difficult for governments to put in place labor regulation to tax the digital economy and to offer adequate social protection for these workers.

Policies addressing rural youth employment need to adopt holistic solutions: 'one size fits all' solutions don't work. We 'tested' youth policies from the four EYW countries[xxii] to assess whether they address the factors and megatrends outlined above and anticipate the future of work. We found that while they work well in terms of their overall approach and focus on the enabling environment, they anticipate the future of work in only a limited fashion and with worrying little attention to technological and environmental change.

Addressing inequalities needs to be at the heart of policy making; there are limits to what can be achieved by focusing on education and employment without also addressing the underlying causes of young people's unequal position in society.[xxiii] Given the threats to freedom of assembly and association from closing civic space and internet shutdowns,[xxiv] and the backlash against women's rights worldwide, defending space for civil society and feminist activists is vital to empower and protect rural youth.

Overall, it is crucial to 'think youth, act structurally': to act on a larger scale, society-wide, to lift everyone up. Youth are part of families and communities; policies to help rural youth therefore need to address the broader issues of a stable and habitable climate and decent jobs for all, not just for young people.[xxv] This research shows the urgent need for policies that are fit for the future of work for rural youth, in the face of rapid changes in our technological, climate and political realities. It raises some key strategic questions for civil society:

- How can civil society support freedom of assembly, expression and association to defend the online and offline space in order to protect the interests of marginalized and deprived groups, including rural youth and women?
- How do we convene a society-wide dialogue in which social partners consensually agree how new technologies can be incorporated for the common good?
- How can new technologies be used to enhance workers' agency and capabilities, safety and efficiency?
- How can the economic benefits generated by digitization be shared in ways that mitigate disruption, provide social protection payments and enable retraining for decent work and quality jobs?
- How can we promote a 'just transition' to a circular economy, which promotes sustainable livelihood opportunities for young people in rural areas?

[i] Artuso, F. and Guijt, I. (2020) *Global Megatrends: Mapping the forces that affect us all* (p. 72), Oxford, England: Oxfam, http://hdl.handle.net/10546/620942

[ii] GSMA Intelligence (2020) *Connected Women: The Mobile Gender Gap Report 2020*, https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/GSMA-The-Mobile-Gender-Gap-Report-2020.pdf (accessed 4 March 2020)

[iii] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs and Population Division (2019) *World Population Prospects 2019: Highlights*, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/WPP2019_Highlights.pdf

[iv] IFAD (2019) *2019 Rural Development Report: Creating Opportunities for Rural Youth* (p. 294), https://www.ifad.org/documents/38714170/41133075/RDR_report.pdf/7282db66-2d67-b514-d004-5ec25d9729a0

[v] IPCC; Barros, V.R.; Dokken, D.J.; Mach, K.J. and Mastrandrea, M.D. (Eds) (2014) *Climate Change 2014 Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability: Working Group II Contribution to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, http://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107415379

[vi] Huq, N.; Hugé, J.; Boon, E. and Gain, A.K. (2015) 'Climate Change Impacts in Agricultural Communities in Rural Areas of Coastal Bangladesh: A Tale of Many Stories', *Sustainability* 7.7: 8437–8460, http://doi.org/10.3390/su7078437

[vii] R.M. Wise, J.R.A. Butler, W. Suadnya, K. Puspadi, I. Suharto, T.D. Skewes (2016) 'How climate compatible are livelihood adaptation strategiesand development programs in rural Indonesia?', *Climate Risk Management* 12: 100–114.

[viii] Mersha, A.A. and Van Laerhoven, F. (2016) 'A gender approach to understanding the differentiated impact of barriers to adaptation: responses to climate change in rural Ethiopia', *Regional Environmental Change* 16.6: 1701–1713, http://doi.org/10.1007/s10113-015-0921-z

[ix] Ali, S.; Liu, Y.; Ishaq, M.; Shah, T.; Abdullah; Ilyas, A. and Din, I.U. (2017) 'Climate Change and Its Impact on the Yield of Major Food Crops: Evidence from Pakistan', *Foods* 6.6: 39, http://doi.org/10.3390/foods6060039

[x] CIVICUS (2019) *People Power Under Attack 2019*, Johannesburg, South Africa: Civicus, https://civicus.contentfiles.net/media/assets/file/GlobalReport2019.pdf (accessed 10 January 2020)

[xi] Hossain, N.; Khurana, N.; Nazneen, S.; Oosterom, M.; Schröder, P. and Shankland, A. (2019) *Development Needs Society - The Implications of Civic Space for the Sustainable Development Goals*, Geneva, Switzerland: ACT Alliance, https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/handle/20.500.12413/14541 (accessed 10 January 2020)

[xii] CIVICUS (2020) 'CIVICUS Monitor (2020) National Civic Space Ratings', https://monitor.civicus.org/ (accessed 10 January 2020)

[xiii] Roberts, T. (2019) *Closing Civic Space and Inclusive Development in Ethiopia*, IDS Working Paper 527, Brighton, UK: IDS, https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/handle/20.500.12413/14471 (accessed 30 March 2020)

[xiv] Artuso, F. and Guijt, I. (2020) *Global Megatrends: Mapping the forces that affect us all* (p. 72), op. cit.

[xv] IFAD (2019) *2019 Rural Development Report*, op. cit.

[xvi] International Labour Office (2015) *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2015: Scaling up investments in decent jobs for youth* (p. 98), Geneva Switzerland: International Labour Office, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_412015.pdf

[xvii] OECD (2018) *The Future of Rural Youth in Developing Countries: Tapping the Potential of Local Value Chains*, OECD, http://doi.org/10.1787/9789264298521-en

[xviii] International Labour Office (2018) *World Employment and Social Outlook 2018 – Greening with jobs* (p. 189), Geneva Switzerland: International Labour Office, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_628654.pdf

[xix] Sumberg, J.; Szyp, C.; Mader, P. and Sabates-Wheeler, R. (2020) *Social Protection, Youth and Livelihood Building: An IA-IDS Learning Journey Report*, Report 1:(unpublished), Brighton: IDS

[xx] OECD (2018) *The Future of Rural Youth in Developing Countries*, op. cit.

[xxi] S4YE (2018) *Digital Jobs for Youth: Young Women in the Digital Economy* (p. 270), Solutions for Youth Employment (S4YE), https://www.s4ye.org/sites/default/files/2018-11/S4YE%20Digital%20Jobs%20Report.pdf (accessed 28 November 2019)

[xxii] Bangladesh: National Youth Policy 2017, https://dyd.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/dyd.portal.gov.bd/policies/21e565b2_252f_4f80_bfce_31a1cb33163d/Draft%20English%20Version%20of%20National%20Youth%20Policy%202017%20(1).pdf and the National Skills Development Policy 2011, https://www.skillsforemployment.org/KSP/en/Details/?dn=FM11G_021629.
Indonesia: The National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN), https://www.indonesia-investments.com/projects/government-development-plans/national-long-term-development-plan-rpjpn-2005-2025/item308.
Ethiopia: national Plan of Action for Job Creation 2020-2025 Briefing Document, https://jobscommission.gov.et/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/National-Plan-for-Job-Creation-Brief.pdf.
Pakistan: Sindh Youth Policy 2018, https://www.youthaffairs.gos.pk/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Sindh-Youth-Policy-2018.pdf

[xxiii] Glassco, J. and Holguin, L. (2016) *Youth and Inequality: Time to support youth as agents of their own future* (p. 40), Oxfam International

[xxiv] Taye, B. and Access Now (2019) TARGETED, CUT OFF, AND LEFT IN THE DARK The #KeepItOn report on internet shutdowns in 2019, Access Now, https://www.accessnow.org/cms/assets/uploads/2020/02/KeepItOn-2019-report-1.pdf (accessed 16 September 2016)

[xxv] Glover, D. and Sumberg, J. (2020) 'Youth and Food Systems Transformation', *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems*, submitted

© Oxfam Novib, July 2020

The research and report is conducted and written by Dr Becky Faith, Justin Flynn, Kevin Hernandez and Dr Tony Roberts from the Institute of Development Studies (IDS).

The document was edited by Jane Garton.

For more information, or to comment on this publication, please email ronald.moorten@oxfamnovib.nl and/or B.Faith@ids.ac.uk.

Disclaimer: Oxfam in Indonesia works in partnership with the Indonesian Ministry of Social Affairs. This research is commissioned by Oxfam Novib and conducted by the Institute of Development Studies. The data, analysis and results are not directly associated to Oxfam in Indonesia nor the Ministry of Social Affairs. This report is not for publication in Indonesia.

This publication is copyright but the text may be used free of charge for the purposes of advocacy, campaigning, education, and research, provided that the source is acknowledged in full. The copyright holder requests that all such use be registered with them for impact assessment purposes. For copying in any other circumstances, or for re-use in other publications, or for translation or adaptation, permission must be secured and a fee may be charged.

Oxfam Novib
P.O. Box 30919
2500 GX The Hague
The Netherlands
T +31 (0) 70 3421621
info@oxfamnovib.nl
www.oxfamnovib.nl

institute of development studies

OXFAM

EMPOWER YOUTH FOR WORK