

Bonn, 17<sup>th</sup> January 2021**IFOAM - Organics International contribution to the e-Consultation on the HLPE report (draftV0) "Promoting youth engagement and employment in agriculture and food systems"**

IFOAM - Organics International welcomes the consultation process on the HLPE report "Promoting youth engagement and employment in agriculture and food systems" and appreciates the opportunity to send comments and contributions.

The agricultural production brings several risks (e.g. extreme weather events, fluctuant prices) that are usually taken only by farmers. These risks, and their financial implications are a too big burden for the youth, as they are usually lacking the capital, expertise and connections to overcome them. All these factors have discouraged young people to engage with agricultural production for the last decades. These have created several issues, including the risk of losing the traditional agricultural knowledge, the potential loss of traditional crops and have created a generation gap in rural areas. These come with social consequences, such as parents in the production areas left without help, limiting the extent to which innovations can be made. That increases the risk linked to agricultural production and thus, pushing small-scale agriculture further towards becoming a subsistence activity in the long run.

Youth has also the potential to bring to the agricultural production some of the things needed to change the dynamics between the production and consumption areas. The changes on the consumption patterns in the urban areas, shifting to healthier, more diverse and locally-produced food were largely lead by young people. However, these shifts in consumption did not have yet a positive impact on local small-scale farmers or the youth living in the rural areas. In this sense, changes in the consumption did not trigger yet any changes on the governance on the production side. The agricultural production needs innovation, added-value, a better understanding and better communication with the markets. All these factors will improve when youth are involved in that part of food systems. The youth, through their easier connection with consumers can help reduce the communication gaps (e.g. easier access to market prices, identifying consumers' preferences and trends) and as a consequence increase the outreach of their products and improve their incomes. Therefore, youth should be considered agents of change to transform food systems as a whole.

Although most young people all over the world are less interested in farming, organic agriculture demonstrated to be attractive for young people. They decide to stay in the countryside or do farming from the cities. Organic farming, thanks to taking care of the health of nature and human beings and improving farmers livelihood, is a lot more appealing to younger generations. Looking at the consumption side, families with younger consumers, in general, prefer organic fruits and vegetables than consumers of any other age group. While 50 years ago it represented only a minority, now it is a well-known phenomenon in developed countries.

In Italy<sup>1</sup> for example, young people between 20 and 39 years old run 22% of organic farms, and only 9% of the total number of farms. It is a similar case, although with a less marked difference, for the immediately following age group, with an age not exceeding 64. The younger age is also associated with a higher average qualification of the farmer. In Europe<sup>2</sup>, data on organic farmers shows that they tend to be generally younger than the average conventional farmers. Age distribution of farmers managing farms with some organic area and those without is also strikingly different: farmers younger than 55 represent 61.3% of the organic sector and only 44.2% of the conventional sector.

The trend is also present, though to a smaller scale, in the global south. Unfortunately, data are lacking for most of these countries, but we have a lot of positive stories and projects of youth employment in organic farming in Latin America, Asia and Africa.

The Nutrition in Mountain Agroecosystems (NMA) project<sup>3</sup>, through its Micro-initiatives and the SUNSAIs (Scaling-Up Nutrition Sensitive Agriculture Initiatives) is supporting the introduction of technologies and practices in the organic production in mountain agroecosystems in Peru, Ecuador, Nepal, Pakistan, India, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Ethiopia. Through these initiatives, the NMA project is aiming to introduce elements of innovation, awareness raising and behavioral change that can attract and need the involvement of the youth. These include post-harvest processing, introduction of protein sources, recovery of traditional crops, school gardens among others that target and benefit the youth. Most of these initiatives support local farmers' entrepreneurship and encourage them to access markets and increase their income. We have a collection of examples of these interventions where change is being led by young people. They see an opportunity in organic agriculture to not only improve their health and diets, but also their livelihoods. The NMA project has proven that young people play a key role when it comes to steering and promoting changes in local diets, motivating families to make a change and resourcefully finding connection with the markets.

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<sup>1</sup> Bioreport 2013, Rete Rurale Nazionale, 2013  
[www.reterurale.it/flex/cm/pages/ServeBLOB.php/L/IT/IDPagina/13373](http://www.reterurale.it/flex/cm/pages/ServeBLOB.php/L/IT/IDPagina/13373)

<sup>2</sup> Facts and figures on organic agriculture in the European Union, European Commission, 2016  
[https://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rca/pdf/Organic\\_2016\\_web\\_new.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rca/pdf/Organic_2016_web_new.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> The Project is managed by IFOAM Organics International, FIBL, Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation and Wageningen University <https://www.ifoam.bio/our-work/how/facilitating-organic/nutrition-mountain-agro>