

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



YEFF members in Hera, Dili / Keith Parsons,
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Timor-Leste is facing a major challenge to be able to accommodate between 20,000 to 30,000 young people who enter the labour force each year. Currently, Timor-Leste's economy cannot absorb these young people, as the sectors which provide many jobs such as manufacturing industries are not yet well-developed. On the other hand, the agriculture sector can provide significant employment, but there has been a decline overtime in the number of young farmers around the world, which suggests that young women and men have become less involved in this sector. Most heads of agricultural households are above forty (40) years old, the age at which the productivity of agricultural workers begins to fall. Agricultural households are also dominated by populations with only primary or no formal education. On-the-ground realities show that Timor-Leste's agricultural productivity is low compared to other countries in the Southeast Asia region.

There are various factors which influence the reduced involvement of young women and men in agriculture:

- Many young people choose not to participate in agricultural activities because they believe that agriculture cannot sustain their lives and respond to their needs.
- Young people face difficulties in accessing agricultural means of production such as equipment and irrigation.
- Young people cannot access capacity building programs which can prepare them to become farmers.
- Poor road conditions in rural areas make it difficult for farmers to access markets and other opportunities.
- Many parents do not encourage their children to become farmers because they do not believe agriculture can provide a better life for their children.
- The Government provides little assistance for young people to become involved in agriculture or support when they face situations which reduce their motivation to work in agriculture.
- The Government has provided significant support for farmers, including equipment and funding, but there has been insufficient accompaniment and assistance for farmers to



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manage this support so that it can have sustained benefits.

- There is a perception among the public that subsidy policies for citizens of various categories have made it easy to obtain money and thus have reduced the incentive to be involved in agricultural production.
- There is a perception among the public that young people do not want to be involved in agricultural activities because they do not want to work hard and prefer work which brings quick benefits.
- Many young people can find work in Dili in the formal and informal sectors and obtain incomes which are enough to support their lives.

Most young women and men who leave agricultural work to search for employment in Dili continue to hope to return to their home area when they see that agriculture can provide opportunities to earn a decent wage which can respond to their needs and improve their lives. On the other hand, young women and men who are currently involved in agricultural activity tend to be involved because such work can support theirs and their families' lives. Most of these young people also believe that they should not depend on their parents or the Government to create employment for them. Instead, these young people feel that they can create their own work

and also create opportunities for others. They also tend to see their agricultural activities as contributing to national development.

Young women farmers and disabled people are participating less in agriculture due to problems related to means of production and markets. While some Government agricultural programs and policies have included consideration of the rights of women farmers, other programs have given preference to men to access agricultural means of production. Government agricultural programs are not yet sufficiently sensitive to young women and men with disabilities, as they have not consulted with people with disabilities to fully understand which kinds of production means they need and how they can access markets. Disabled youth who participate in agricultural work tend to organize themselves in groups or join civil society organizations which work on youth and disability issues. Disabled youth are concerned that the Government assumes that they cannot be involved in agriculture, even though in reality they can be involved according to their individual abilities.

The Government has a major commitment to increasing the participation of young women and men in the agricultural sector in a more sustainable way. The Government has already provided various forms of support to youth to be more involved in agriculture, through technical support and budget allocations. However, some Government officials also recognize that this support has not yet achieved sustainability, as there has been a lack of continuity in these programs. Respondents from the Government acknowledge further that it is extremely important to ensure the continuity of programs which support youth participation in agriculture from one government to the next. Furthermore, Government programs related to youth in agriculture are scattered across different state institutions, without an established coordination system for ensuring synergy between programs implemented by separate institutions such as the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, Ministry of Commerce, Tourism and Industry, the Secretary of State for Youth and Sport and the Secretary of State for Cooperatives.