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A **guide for young**

people of rural

Latin America and

the Caribbean

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IICA 

foreword:

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Our ability to improve the quality of life and combat of poverty in the Americas goes hand in hand with the development of the human and social capital of our people, and with the preservation of the Earth's biodiversity.

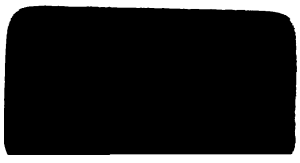
In this context, young people have a major role to play in achieving greater well-being for all.

This "Guide for the Young People of Rural Latin America and the Caribbean" will contribute to the education and training of young people and help them to build a better world.

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It is the rural towns and villages of Latin American and the Caribbean that hold the resources which are the keys to developing their societies' productive capacities.

Rural resources provide a nation's food security and environmental wealth, as well as ancestral knowledge and experience. The rural environment is also home to the resource that is the most important of all in addressing the challenge of change in today's world: young people.

Every day millions of young people in the countryside produce new ideas and tools, and invent previously unimagined ways of solving problems.

Nature has been their playmate and intimate from infancy on. In daily relationship with nature, and in the company of family and friends, young people's lives embody a new and changing image of the world and the universe of which it is a part.

As field workers, young men and women are indispensable to the growing and harvesting of crops, to the care and management of livestock, and to preparing food products for the market and getting them there.

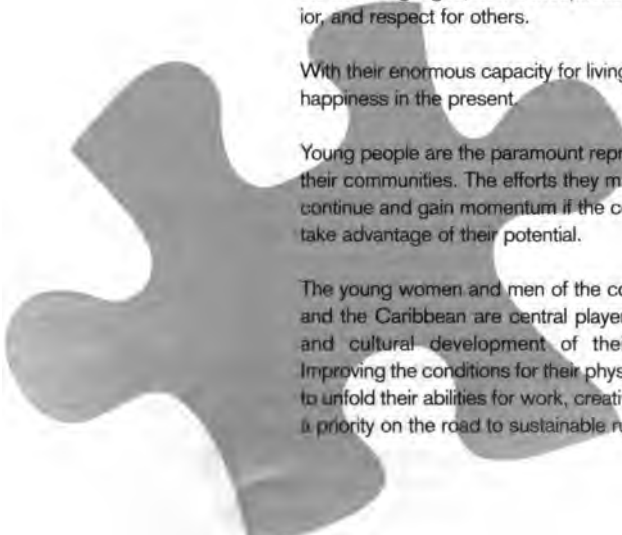
As students, they produce theories that will some day transform the world.

And though they are often not listened to, they indefatigably create new languages, new conceptions of harmony, proper behavior, and respect for others.

With their enormous capacity for living, they embody the hope of happiness in the present.

Young people are the paramount representation of the energy of their communities. The efforts they make toward a better life will continue and gain momentum if the communities where they live take advantage of their potential.

The young women and men of the countryside in Latin America and the Caribbean are central players in the economic, social, and cultural development of their region's communities. Improving the conditions for their physical and intellectual abilities to unfold their abilities for work, creativity, and decision making is a priority on the road to sustainable rural development.



Young people: roads and stars

roads

The roads that link country and city contain the history of many generations. Urban generations in search of greater well being migrate to the countryside for a life based on the earth and its resources. Meanwhile, generations of country folk leave their towns in hopes of forging a future in the city.

The division between country and city is a major feature of past and present societies. An entire system for exploiting natural, technological, and human resources is premised on it and has led to the growing productive capacity that today's nations enjoy. The country-city division also marks different worlds of opportunity for young people.

Young people as a whole, including farm workers, students, and some who are heads of family, constitute a generation, a large and varied group of people of differing racial and cultural make-up and skills who live in a landscape as varied as they themselves.

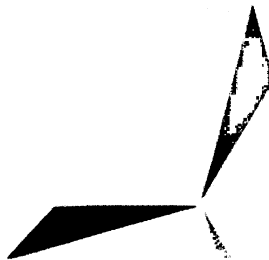
A generation is also a grouping to which people feel they belong, and for this to occur requires that they share characteristics or interests.

Generally, development initiatives and projects involve young people between the ages of 12 and 24.

The opportunities open to young rural people and young urban people are unequal and different.

Unequal because the city offers better and more possibilities for study and training than the country. This is related to the fact that formal education was first developed in the cities and only later came to the countryside. Urban areas also offer a wider range of work opportunities, though the opportunities are not as abundant as many people think.

Different because the challenges that rural youth face will play a decisive role in the ways that nations produce and live in the future. It is these young people who embody the potential to manage natural resources in a better way while maintaining high levels of productivity.





The differences and inequalities between rural and urban living conditions cause inequitable distribution of access to jobs and education, which are the two main rewards that modern society holds out to young people in exchange for their efforts.

The great dilemma is that despite the importance of rural youth, not only to their families, but for the development of the towns and societies in which they live, their abilities and contributions are generally invisible.

For a contribution to be invisible means that it is not recognized as a contribution, and that therefore it is not properly rewarded. For example, despite the fact that many young women and men who grow up in the country work from early childhood on, thus participating in the production of wealth and developing their capacity for responsibility, they are denied access to credit for developing their own projects.

In the family sphere, young people are important not only for the work they do on the farm, in the home, or in other types of work, but also because they are key links in the chain of knowledge that the family embodies, uses, and passes on.

From generation to generation, through the mechanism of the family, ancestral knowledge about the environment and ways of producing is perpetuated. From an early age, young people absorb it along with the skills that go with working the earth. But young people also bring new knowledge into the family, for example, new agricultural techniques, products, and fertilizers, and new ways of selling and of opening up markets.

Nevertheless, young family members seldom enjoy the right to make decisions about their present or future. They are almost never consulted about their views and thinking, since they are presumed to be too young to have a serious contribution to make.

Factors such as the level of poverty in the home can make the voices of young people even less listened to, and render their work and contribution even more invisible. Young people from poor households, those who are female, those who are minors, those who live in areas far removed from public services, and members of cultures that are discriminated against by the rest of society tend to have less access to those economic and social resources without which their

abilities cannot fully develop.

Young rural people do have things in common that exist across these differences, however. In most cases, the development of their potential is put off to the future, to a time roughly ten years down the road when they find themselves replacing the productive adult labor force.

When rural youth's present capacities and potential are not taken seriously, and when their development is put off to the future, it is said that these young people are subject to deferred potential.

The barriers that make young rural people's work and contributions invisible, while their opinions, world view, and decision-making abilities go unacknowledged, are rooted not only in culture but also in socio-economic realities. To bring these barriers down by more participatory projects and programs is indispensable, even if it does take time for change to occur.

stars

As human beings, we all have the right to develop our abilities and potential. As people, we are the principal resource and the ultimate end of all economic, technological, and social action and progress. The final destiny of the fruits of labor is to foster human development, and for this to occur economic growth must be ever more equitably distributed in a society's population.

In the past, it was said that the importance of young people in nations' economic development was in the quantity of work that they could contribute to in other words, what mattered was their strong bodies and endurance, and that their large number lowered the cost of human labor in production.

Today, technological advances are making young people leading players in the management of new systems of production based on a more intensive use of knowledge. So if young people were an important resource before, they are even more important now.

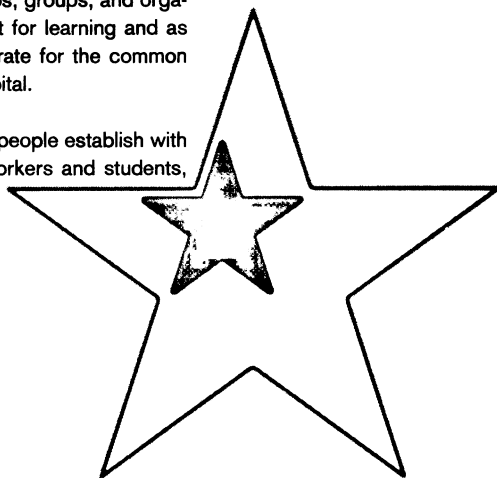
Young people have an ability to understand and master new things. They have acquired the ability to learn, and to share tools and technologies in contexts as different as the classroom, home, and workplace. The ability to operate machinery (whether a tractor or a computer), the skill and intuition needed to recognize the cycles of nature and the environment, and all the abilities that come from the experience of being a young person, all this constitutes youth's human capital.

But in addition, young men and women of the countryside have another type of valuable capital: the ability to relate to other people, to create new relationships, groups, and organizations that can function as a context for learning and as channels through which people cooperate for the common good. This is young people's social capital.

Through the social relations that young people establish with family members, friends, and fellow workers and students,

there is a transmission of skills and knowledge, traditions, standards, and values. Furthermore, these networks can function as a source of cooperation and mutual aid. For example, it is common to go to family members and friends in looking for work or putting together a loan to carry out a project or meet needs.

To recognize the value and importance of young people's human capital and social capital means having an understanding of the many ways and channels that can serve to develop young people's potential as a substantive element contributing to sustainable rural development in the societies of which they are a part.



II. What are the realities of life for young people in rural villages and towns today?

population:



While many adults continue living where they were born or where they brought up their family, many young people leave their home towns to go to the city in search of better jobs and a better way of life.

Many young women go to the city in an attempt to forge an independent life, because the country fails to offer work or study opportunities and family life is a heavy weight on them.

By the year 2005, there will be fewer young people in the countryside, though that does not mean that they will be less important.

The rural population between the ages of 12 and 24 is a little over 30 million in Latin America and the Caribbean. Thus, the quantitative or numerical importance of young people in the region is undeniable.

Nonetheless, there is a trend for the population as a whole to become older in Latin America. The fact that young population is decreasing in number and that there are increasing proportions of adults in the region's rural communities is due mainly to the constant migration of young people leaving their places of origin either temporarily or permanently.

A fall-off in the frequency of births has also been observed. In other words, there is a decreased fertility rate among young women in rural areas.

It must be taken into account that life today includes new risks which are not under the control of available health services. They include threats such as violence, drug abuse, crime, prostitution, and the increase of contagious diseases such as AIDS.

When young people leave their home towns, the towns lose not only the valued inhabitants themselves, but also the energy, capacity for work, and imagination which those people embody.

Education

Today's young people have had and continue to have greater opportunities to go to grammar school and secondary school. This gives them advantages, since, as a generation, they now have greater human capital

Today's young people are thus better prepared, and their training is more flexible, allowing them to change systems of production and marketing to produce a greater integration of these activities.

Previous generations acquired their skills mostly in agricultural work, using simple technology. The economic activity and daily routine of communities were more isolated and tended to be more of a closed circle.

As agriculture has changed and modernized, new abilities and skills have been needed in order to incorporate new technologies and machinery, and in order to integrate the various links of the chain that starts with agricultural production, goes through distribution and marketing, and ends with the consumption of food.

The opening up of new markets and the need to create systems that can make these activities function on a larger industrial and commercial scale is indispensable today in order to generate value added.

In other words, it is important that the wealth generated by villages and towns in the process of producing goods not go elsewhere, but that it remains local and be invested in further development.

These greater levels of integration and technological development point the way toward an intelligent agriculture. This means an agriculture based on intensive use of the burgeoning information and knowledge about how to improve production, agroindustrial, and marketing processes with the least possible harm to the environment.

This does not mean that previous generations have not

contributed with their thought, inventiveness, and knowledge. A great deal of the change and innovation that have revolutionized agriculture have come from the countryside and been taken up later by large companies.

An example of this is the development of the coffee-processing industry. The local knowledge of which young people are the heirs has been little recognized in this case.

Then again, numerous activities beyond agriculture are emerging in many of the region's rural population centers, increasing the gamut of jobs available to young people. Agroindustrial activity, tourism, environmental conservation, and a variety of commercial activities are examples.

Rural communities are more interconnected. In some cases they even produce for direct export abroad.



In this context, the human capital represented by young people in rural areas should be understood for what it is: something that goes beyond the question of level of formal education and has key importance in various ways:

- **As a source of traditional and ancestral information on the local environment.**
- **As a capacity for change and technological innovation.**
- **As a channel through which knowledge is transmitted to other generations.**
- **As a potential for greater inter-connection between the rural and urban worlds.**
- **As a creative capacity for problem solving and decision-making.**

Though this great potential has increased with the advantages that go along with being formally more educated, the strictly relative importance of this should not be lost sight of.

Though the educational level of the younger generation is higher, many rural young people hardly know how to read and write, and many do not even finish grammar school, so that there is some deterioration in the educational system in this respect.

Students drop out of school, either because the conditions in which they live make it difficult or impossible for them to study, or because they are not drawn to classroom learning.

The high drop-out rates in the formal educational system also reflect the fact that these systems are not designed to respond to the needs, peculiarities, and interests of the younger generation.

Along with profound reforms in formal educational systems and curricula, non-formal training and alternative educational projects must be fostered.

Solid training based on the realities of the rural world increases the ability to handle advanced knowledge and technology, as well as paving the way for new job opportunities.



Whether in the fields or in the home, with its tasks and obligations, young people in rural towns and villages work from a very early age on. In general, young people in the countryside enter the world of work and its obligations at an earlier age than people in the cities.

For this reason, their presence as a paid working population, or economically active population (EAP) is greater.

For example, in 1995 in Latin America and the Caribbean as a region, approximately half of rural youth between 15 and 19 years old worked, compared to only 30% of urban youth of the same age.

The generation of young men and women workers in rural areas are a key factor for increasing value added in production. As creators of wealth, this should benefit them directly.

Even so, a great deal of their work and contribution remain unrecognized. The majority of young people work without receiving any pay at all, giving their work energy to the family dwelling or farm, with the promise of a reward at some future time.

Nevertheless, young people do not have the conditions they need to make decisions about or deal with information about the laws that affect their present lives.

Whether "adults" or "minors," the young men and women of the countryside are citizens whose lives represent discrimination in terms of rights and duties.

By getting young people to recognize themselves as productive, creative beings, and by making them able to defend their rights and get the rest of society to value them

as well, we are taking a step toward a different type of political action.

This is a step toward a distribution of power based on recognition of the contributions and wealth of every human being. This is a step toward a way of living together that is based on the value of cooperation and reciprocity.

Young workers are actors on a stage where rapid cultural change is the order of the day. They reflect the disintegration of societal values. But they also embody the hope of renewed integration through new forms of participatory activity.



III. Which way does the wind blow?

Based on the above scenario, with young rural people playing a central role, it is important to clarify which way things are moving.

In other words, what large trends in the development of societies affect and challenge young people in particular? Every trend represents not only opportunities but risks and limitations.



Trend

Young people continue to be better educated than their predecessors. Young people will continue having higher levels of schooling.

Opportunities:

Young people are potential leaders in the transformation of technology and production which is part of the modernization of agriculture, industry, and services, and which is a driving force behind the so-called "intelligent agriculture."

The transforming potential of young people's human and social capital opens the door for them to participate more fully in local organizations.

It also paves the way for them to create new organizations that more closely address their needs, more open and flexible groupings that strengthen their identity and their ability to share and cooperate.

Limitations:

Greater exposure to urban and global knowledge and values will have a strong impact on the sense of identity and ways of life that people experience in rural settings.

The impact will be especially great for young people, given their intimate relationship with change.

Ways will have to be found to manage the negative effects that new technologies, the communications media, and increased contact with other values and life styles can have.

Existing educational structures must be used, proposing changes in secondary programs and curricula in order to move toward a more flexible and diverse type of formal education.

Additional venues must be created for young people to dialogue and share their experiences based on their own views, language, and way of being.

Non-formal training programs such as workshops and camps can fill-in gaps in the educational system and help young people who are not in a situation to undertake formal education take advantage of their talents.

Trend

Young people's work opportunities will change as a result of the economic integration and globalization that is taking place on an international level today.

Opportunities:

With globalization, there will be more demand for informed, knowledgeable, and skilled workers. Globalization makes agriculture more competitive.

In response, the production process must become more efficient. To this end, new technologies will be used, and marketing processes will be improved. Information handling will play a central role.

Another way for agriculture to compete is to increase the value added. Post-harvest systems such as packing and processing plants will call for more labor from young people. Indeed, governments and private enterprise have already adopted policies to encourage setting up plants.

In other words, there will be many new aspects to agricultural production, and young people's ability to learn and solve problems will be indispensable.

This new situation will force young people into greater activity and will probably lead them to dedicate more time to activities outside the home.

Limitations:

A great deal of the work done by young people is "invisible." In other words, its utility and indispensability are not recognized by adults.

A lack of trust in the potential of young people and their ability to assume responsibility means that they cannot easily get access to facilitating factors such as credit, they cannot exercise a right to land use, and they cannot use land rights as something to build to.

Achieving a fuller and more flexible relationship between younger and older generations is a difficult challenge and sometimes seems impossible. It is, however, achievable, even if change is slow.

The creation of programs or loan funds especially designed for young people, the development of projects for and by young people, and the creation of youth-run

businesses are areas where the ability of young people to take on challenges and responsibilities can be demonstrated.

Trend

Young people's knowledge of nature is valuable in developing proposals for ways of producing with less damage to natural wealth.

Opportunities:

During their work in the fields, recreational hikes, and swimming, young people acquire a great deal of information on the properties of the earth, nature, and ecology of the places where they live. This adds to what they learn from their families and friends.

Such knowledge can give young people great advantages when it comes to proposing changes having to do with adjusting or adapting new production techniques to rural settings so that productivity can be high without neglecting care for the environment. Young people are not only producers. They are also taxonomists of ecological wealth and relationships.

Limitations:

The rate at which the technologies of many agricultural and other activities are becoming more environment-friendly is very slow. Though there is more awareness today of environmental damage, there are people who are not disposed to change their habitual ways of producing and living.

Another factor that must be taken into account is that the countryside has been disappearing, with urban development moving forward rapidly. Today there are increased numbers of landless people who must improvise their housing in the countryside. Foreigners buying land in rural areas are also a factor.

If this pace of change continues, many people today and in the future will not be able to enjoy the nature, trees, fruit, and birds that the countryside offers today.

Young people's networks of friends, neighbors, and relatives can provide opportunities to develop a new vision of environmental issues. New proposals, projects, and programs to facilitate the exchange of information among young people can come out of these contexts, and can help young people transmit their knowledge of nature's richness to other people.

Trend

Some of the conditions are being created to increase young people's participation in decision making on issues that directly or indirectly affect their lives.

Opportunities:

In many Latin American and Caribbean countries experience-based programs have been designed to strengthen democracy. There is a trend for national governments to move important functions to the local and community level.

National government today is unable to do many of the things that it used to, and many people in the rural setting are reacting to this, looking for solutions themselves. New leaders have arisen in this process.

This renewal of local leadership may create opportunities for young people to participate in existing organizations. But creating new organizations is even more important.

Limitations:

There is a lack of recognition of the rights and duties of young citizens. This limits young people to developing proposals for change.

Added to the lack of formal recognition of young people's rights is the factor of increasing intergenerational conflict. Accelerated change produces insecurity in young people, and family pressure is sometimes very strong.

More and more young people aspire to ways of life and values that older generations neither know nor understand. This increases the distance and conflict between generations, and intergenerational conflict is one of the things that drive young people to leave their places of origin and seek greater independence, despite the new problems that they then have to deal with.

The risks associated with poverty, such as theft, violence, and increased drug use, are a great weight on young people.

Training in decision-making skills is a direct investment in the creation of new leadership. New leadership requires a solid institutional base, and this institutional base should be broadened as time goes on. The first step is for information on young people's rights and duties as citizens to be more available.



IV. IICA's Rural Youth proposal

The Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) is an organization that works on the international level to support rural development in Latin American and Caribbean countries. It is supported by the governments of these countries, and its aim is cooperation at various levels.

IICA has for decades recognized the key importance of young people in rural development. This has led it to promote activities and programs that aim to increase knowledge of the realities of young people's lives and to support their participation.

In today's world, with the role of the state in development shifting away from what it has been, IICA recognizes that technical cooperation for organization and change is more important than ever. It is in this context that a Strategic Proposal for Action is being presented to young people.

Like all proposals, its relevance must be tested and it must be revised and transformed in collaboration with the groupings of young people involved, taking their potentials and what they feel to be urgent into account factors which often coincide with priorities that are prevalent in their places of origin.

The proposal follows principles whose aim is to take advantage of characteristics peculiar to the region's young people.



Principles of action :

Actions and strategies should be created with the following factors in mind:

.The differences that exist among young people in the region: cultural diversity, age and gender differences, and inequality of socio-economic conditions.

.Development of specific present abilities of young people as a starting point.

.The need to strengthen and forge alliances with key players, such as international, regional, national, and local organizations, both public and private.

.The need to develop proposals that accord with the strengths and weaknesses of the various groupings of young people involved.

.The need to decentralize information-based power by creating networks.

.Mobilization of local resources. Ongoing updating and evaluation of proposals.

The approach :

Based on the above principles, the form of work with the groups involved will be planned with the following factors taken into consideration:

- a Participation of young people in decision-making.
- b Creation of conditions (abilities and rights) to generate opportunities.
- c Fostering activities to enhance cooperation and understanding between the younger generation and adults.
- d Activities designed to combine recreation, education, and participation.

Lines of strategic action :

- 1 Create a framework of policy and standards for action with rural youth, addressing both young people's rights and commitments.

Support could be given to developing a document on the rights of rural Latin American and Caribbean youth, including guiding principles and participatory priorities. It is important for this purpose to hold a meeting of hemispheric scope, with youth organizations participating.

Develop a proposed methodology for working with rural youth.

- 2 One approach would be to foster and support projects for sharing of experience, for example, participatory workshops for young people on development initiatives and business activities. Publications and other information, such as cd-roms or web pages, would come out of these events.
- 3 Support changes in the form and content of education and training for young people in rural settings.

Seminars could be organized to review policies and curricula in agricultural education. Training programs and projects for young people in their own communities could also be organized.

- 4 Contribute to the transformation of production in the region's rural towns and villages, with rural young people as the key actors.

Detailed studies on the labor market for young people need to be done. A connection could also be established to link the computer labs of agricultural teaching centers with centers that provide management support services to small businesses. Young people could participate more actively in these small business centers.

- 5 Creating conditions for developing the region's young people's business initiatives and abilities.

To design pilot projects for the creation of youth enterprises that would use and provide environment-friendly technologies. Another would be to organize creative camps for identifying, designing, and organizing youth enterprises. Documents would come out of these camps. The creation of revolving funds for young people is another possible form of support.

- 6 Strengthening youth participation in local organizations and citizenship activities.

It is important to support the creation of new youth organizations, as well as facilitate the promotion of discussion projects and campaigns for young people on their communities problems and possible solutions.

- 7 Supporting processes that strengthen young people's generational and geographical identity in the context of the great cultural changes taking place today.

Creative formulas can be found to strengthen the identities that contribute to dealing with and assimilating cultural and technological change. An example is radio programs by young people themselves.

GLOSSARY

Intelligent agriculture: agriculture based on the intensive use of information and knowledge about how to improve production and marketing processes with the least possible harm to the environment.

Human capital: People's ability to learn, and to exchange knowledge, tools, and technologies as they move to understand and master new aspects of the world they live in.

Social capital: Ability to relate with others, and to create new relationships, groups, and organizations where learning and cooperation for the common good take place.

Globalization: Economic integration at the worldwide level.

Generational identity: group of persons who share similar age or experience of life. For example, the generation of students who graduated from a school in 1998.

Deferred potential: When the present abilities and potential of rural young men and women are not taken seriously, and their development is contemplated only in the future.

Value added: to make a product more valuable for the person who produces it. For example, if a coffee producer not only grows the bean but also processes it for sale, his product has greater value added.



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