

# Rural youth inclusion, empowerment and participation

by  
Carolina Trivelli  
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## Abstract

This exploratory paper focuses on participation in decision-making processes and how rural youth could benefit from its use in development projects and initiatives. General literature and relevant international experiences related to participation mechanisms aimed at youth show that participation boosts interventions linked to improvements of young people's livelihoods and developmental opportunities. Participation also makes interventions more responsive to the actual needs of young people.

However, participation mechanisms are less explored (and used) in rural settings: we know little of the effectiveness of rural participation, especially for youth, in developing countries. Different contexts associated with varying extents of structural rural transformation call for better understanding of what works on participation/engagement in different rural areas (traditional, transformed, in transition, etc.). There is not a strong conceptual or generally accepted practical guide to youth participation in rural settings and no major discussions on the role of participation in the rural transformation process or about the opportunities to implement participatory approaches to enhance youth opportunities within rural transformation.

Based on a review of 54 documented cases of participation of rural youth in developing countries, and following the International Association for Public Participation's scale of participation, we conclude that there are opportunities to set up different mechanisms to inform, consult with, collaborate with and empower rural youth. Regarding information mechanisms, the adoption of information and communication technologies in rural areas opens windows of opportunity to overcome geographical isolation, dispersion, high transaction costs of participating and restrictive social norms about interaction with outsiders, while bringing policymaking closer to rural youth. Consultative mechanisms such as workshops and assemblies – although they can easily become tokenistic – may support youth inclusion by setting up long-term platforms to collect youth's voices and preferences. Collaborative mechanisms (such as panels, boards and steering committees) support the involvement of youth in decision-making through the establishment of intergenerational work platforms where youth voices are seriously taken into account. Finally, empowering mechanisms (such as youth-run institutions) are the ultimate forms of youth participation, although their actual implementation might require previous interventions to level up human capital that supports the complexities of running such organizations.

Specifically looking at the positive experiences reviewed in this paper, we conclude that mechanisms for participation by rural youth could produce results in collecting youth preferences around a particular topic in the long run; providing them and their organizations with capital; and connecting youth with new institutions, organizations and territories that provide opportunities for skill formation and alliances.

The research agenda on the participation of rural youth is vast. Particularly, there is an urgent need for quantitative data, randomized control trials and sound qualitative evaluations to complement some of the evidence presented in this exploratory paper. Those data would let us compare territories with different levels of rural transformation, thus informing new interventions with highly contextualized measures.

## 1. Introduction: participation as a tool to create and access better opportunities

Participation has been at the core of pro-youth strategies in recent years. Either because it channels youth voices on topics relevant to them or because it improves the delivery of results of interventions and policies targeting them, engagement of young people has gained a high profile among international organizations, governments and NGOs. With the increasing presence of young people in decision-making mechanisms, the question of “who participates” has also gained salience: do participative mechanisms reach the most vulnerable youth? Concerning IFAD’s mission, that brings us to two questions. First, and foremost, how do current participative interventions manage (or not) to overcome geographical isolation, low levels of social capital and rigid social norms to engage rural youth in traditional, adult-driven rural settings? And second, so far, what trends can we find in the participation literature regarding the role of structural rural transformation?<sup>1</sup>

There are many ways to approach the study of participation. For some authors, participation refers to the broad set of opportunities citizens have to influence (and challenge) decisions in the public sphere. Concerning youth, events such as the Arab Spring or recent mobilizations for gun control in the United States show youth trying to change the political status quo, which is defended mostly by older generations. Young people do not have enough financial and organized human resources to act as pressure groups, so they are more likely to engage in popular mobilizations, which have taken many forms in the recent past.<sup>2</sup> Literature on collective action and social movements includes a significant amount work under this contentious politics approach with youth as one of the main actors (Gamson, 1990, McAdam et al., 2001; Tarrow, 2011; Tilly and Tarrow, 2012).

Other perspectives study participation in the form of electoral politics. Normative perspectives consider elections (including primary, general and local elections and referendums) as the supreme way in which people engage in relevant decision-making in their contexts. Regarding youth, the electoral approach to participation assumes that younger generations vote distinctly different from older generations and are able to push change by the force of their collective vote. In many countries, promotion of youth participation is focused on engaging young people to vote in elections. While, in developing countries, youth absence is usually caused by cultural and socio-economic factors,<sup>3</sup> abstention in developed countries is explained in the context of the anti-traditional politics mindset of the millennial generation.<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, practitioners and policymakers use a technical approach to participation by which they see it as decision-making in household or farm management (Pal and Halder, 2016; Najjar et al., 2017) or in non-subsistence activities (such as engagement in deliberations around councils, assemblies, etc.), particularly by vulnerable groups. For others, participation refers to participative approaches in development— such as community-driven development — that supports beneficiaries’

<sup>1</sup> This is a hard question to assess as long as most literature on participation does not seem to recognize that rural settings are diverse as a result of the transformation. In other words, the dichotomy between “urban” and “rural” as separate settings is still in place in that literature. Therefore, we contribute some preliminary ideas on where those two frameworks could meet.

<sup>2</sup> Some examples from the Americas and Europe include the many student revolts against education reforms in Chile, the 132 movement in Mexico, the mobilizations against reforms to the youth employment legislation in Peru, the 15-M movement in Spain and the Occupy movement in the United States, among others. On youth protests in the United States, see Milkman (2017).

<sup>3</sup> As noted in a report by the Youth Development Index: “Poor, uneducated youth, rural youth and young women are less engaged in formal and informal politics than other young people” (Commonwealth, 2016, p. 67, quoted by Phillips and Perezniето, 2018, p. 83).

<sup>4</sup> In this paper, we avoid the debates about what we might call the politics of the millennial generation because the most informed papers on the issue are mostly based on the United States or Western European context. However, on the issue please see Mendelson (2013), Tolentino (2017) and Fisher (2018).

involvement in the design, implementation, monitoring or evaluation of development projects (Gosling and Edwards, 2003).

Finally, definitions of youth participation also come from legal instruments. At the global level, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child “refers to participation as young people’s i) right to freely express their views (Article 12); ii) freedom to seek, receive and impart information (Article 13); iii) freedom of thought, conscience and religion (Article 14); and iv) freedom of association and peaceful assembly (Article 15)” (OECD, 2017, p. 148). Other legal instruments include the World Programme of Action for Youth (1995), the System Wide Action Plan on Youth (2014), the guiding principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the African Youth Charter, the Commonwealth Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment, the Iberoamerican Convention on Youth Rights (2005), the Council of Europe’s Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life and the European Commission’s Youth Strategy (Farrow, 2016, pp. 1-2).

All these approaches have in common that they see participation as a tool for young people to empower themselves particularly in the public sphere, in the context of distant policy formulation by adults; a tool for the current reformulation of electoral politics after the decay of traditional party organization; and – in more deprived settings – an effective tool to shape interventions in accordance with their beneficiaries’ interests and needs.

In this paper, we aim for a specific approach to the study of participation that has been at the core of the literature about the topic for quite a few years: we are interested in those measures that support the inclusion of rural young people in decision-making processes at the national and local levels through various participatory mechanisms and strategies. These decision-making processes could be either state-driven (e.g. local assemblies) or stakeholder-driven (e.g. development programmes carried out by international agencies); what is relevant to our approach is that rural young people participate, and thus are included, in the framing, design, implementation, monitoring or evaluation of the policies and programmes that concern them. Thus, we are working with an institutional approach to participation that will let us extract practical lessons for IFAD’s 2019 Rural Development Report. We recognize and value the importance of other perspectives and we will duly refer to those “non-institutional” approaches whenever it is important to understand each of the case studies we will work on in this paper.

## 2. Participation of rural youth

Approaching young people’s participation in rural areas is particularly challenging. As structural rural transformation unfolds, rural settings in developing countries are increasingly diversified and complex. On the other hand, general literature on how to promote youth inclusion in public policies has an urban bias, a trend increasingly challenged by policymakers and experts.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, virtually none of the participation mechanisms recognize structural rural transformation as a relevant condition affecting their interventions: for participation mechanisms, differentiated interventions based on the location on the urban-rural continuum or the diversification levels of the local economy are not factored into their frameworks or action plans.

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<sup>5</sup> On the urban bias on employment programmes, see Microlinks (2017):

“Louise Fox, Chief Economist for USAID, opened the discussion, highlighting the customary categorization of youth employment as an urban issue, resulting in a lack of evidence for rural approaches. The invisibility of the challenges facing rural youth has, in turn, created blind spots for employment programming. The need to better understand youth’s role in rural economic development is particularly important, as government and donor agencies will increasingly need to ensure that programming improves rural, semi-urban, and peri-urban livelihoods for youth.” In addition: “Programmes tend not to reach the most vulnerable children – rural youth, married girls and out-of-school adolescents” (UNICEF, 2011, p. 35).



Participation/engagement of rural youth has been traditionally a subject of the lowest priority, too: either it has been a minor part of holistic strategies dealing primarily with employment, health or education, or it has been restricted to NGO activities related to the broader issue of civic education.<sup>6</sup>

So far, there are no comprehensive reviews of what a successful implementation of participatory programmes for young people in rural areas would mean.<sup>7</sup> In addition, limitations on the sustainable implementation of participation strategies in traditional rural areas (such as lack of instruction on the core values of public participation at the school level and less importance of the Internet as a tool for socialization) have not been systematically assessed. Moreover, if we were to construct sets of exclusions that make public participation measures difficult to implement, living in a remote rural setting is a first level of exclusion, being a member of an indigenous population is a second, being young is a third and being female is a fourth.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, engaging an indigenous young woman living in a remote rural area in any kind of participatory mechanism requires much more effort, creative policy designs and adequate resources.

In the context of structural rural transformation, participation also shows different trends. In remote agrarian rural territories, participation mechanisms are more complex and costly to implement because of the absence of assets and skills formation to support those interventions. In that sense, participation is less effective at delivering short-term results in rural territories that have not undergone structural transformation than in those under transformation. However, the need for these mechanisms is more urgent precisely in those traditional territories where youth engagement is non-existent, and virtually any measure to integrate youth in decision-making processes helps them to shape policies that affect their lives.

In this background paper, we approach the vast literature on participation and youth-focused public policies and development programmes by analysing which participative measures (if any) could contribute to youth's inclusion in rural settings. We approach to a wide array of programmes, both participatory at their core and also related to general strategies aiming to achieve youth's empowerment. This approach will help us to fill an evidence gap on the issue and will contribute to the literature.<sup>9</sup> In addition, as a second contribution of our paper, we explore how structural rural transformation (particularly urban-rural collaborations triggered by this change) and new technologies (particularly social media and mobile communications) are changing rural youth's links to the public space.

Three clarifications are needed. First, regarding who constitute rural young people on the ground, we work with a wide concept that includes youth not only from rural towns but also from peri-urban zones,

<sup>6</sup> Skalli and Thomas (2015) set out an interesting differentiation between programmes related to civic engagement and programmes working on civic education: the latter are more commonly found (as they are linked to education goals) than the former.

<sup>7</sup> On this matter, we checked the studies produced by Innovation for Poverty Action under the "youth", "community participation" and "electoral participation" labels and we did not find any study related to this issue. Likewise, we checked the systematizations produced by the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation and the evaluations on governance produced by the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab, with the same results. YouthPower's *Systematic review of positive youth development programs in low- and middle-income countries* presents some non-experimental evaluations related to youth participation/engagement that we introduce in the following sections (YouthPower, 2017a).

<sup>8</sup> Let alone other contextual factors such as language diversity, disabilities and migration (DFID, 2010) and levels of social capital (which tend to be lower particularly for relationships outside the community).

<sup>9</sup> On the limitations of the literature on youth participation, see for instance the work of Skalli and Thomas for YouthPower, who argue that so far (Skalli and Thomas, 2015, pp. 9-10):

"the academic empirical literature does not provide a basis for answering the question of 'what works' in youth civic engagement and voice, youth organizations and leadership. There is limited academic empirical work on the impact of youth programming on individuals, organizations, and institutions. The literature does not establish causal links between the impact of interventions on the individual and the long-term impact on governance. There is very little empirical work on the effectiveness of different program components. There is more evidence on the impact of civic education interventions, but the link between civic education and youth civic engagement and voice remains unclear".

intermediate zones and rural hinterland (MicroLinks, 2017),<sup>10</sup> no matter where they are located temporarily.<sup>11</sup> Regarding age, we use the United Nations definition of youth (people aged between 15 and 24 years inclusive; UNDESA, n.d.) although depending on the case studies under examination we could pay attention to experiences outside this age range exceptionally. This approach will help us to work with different case studies and provide recommendations from a wide set of types of rural youth.

Second, as already mentioned, in this paper we are particularly interested in participation understood as engagement of young people in decision-making processes (at all levels, national or subnational, including local communities' formal and informal institutions and private initiatives) and possible development outcomes associated with the establishment of those participative mechanisms.

Third, we recognize that participatory mechanisms could be used in pernicious ways. Leaving aside lip-service on the issue by governments (which will always try to depict their interventions as fully participative) we are aware that patronage mechanisms, tokenism<sup>12</sup> and "instrumentalization for development"<sup>13</sup> could be displayed by governments when supposedly promoting inclusion of young people in decision-making processes.<sup>14</sup>

### 3. Indicators of public participation: tailored for urban youth

There is plenty of evidence that youth participation in policymaking leads to better and more inclusive and sustainable policies, both for young people as a group and for achieving general development goals (UNDESA, 2003; UNFPA, 2007; DFID, 2010). Head points out that "there is a strong argument that services, programs and policies that have direct impacts on young people (and especially those intended to benefit them as 'clients') will be more efficient and effective if young people's perspectives are engaged in the planning, delivery and evaluation of services" (Head, 2011, p. 543). If we think about participation as a means to achieve desirable policy outcomes in the form of public goods for youth, inclusion of young people in participatory mechanisms supports the early appropriation of those goods by their users, a widely recognized requirement for the success of any policy (Driver, 2014).

Participation also bolsters youth skills in the form of "self-esteem and self-development outcomes" (Head, 2011, p. 543). Contrary to notions that young people are not ready yet to assume proactive roles in policymaking, it has been proved that they "can be involved directly in planning processes and the evaluation of program effectiveness" (Head, 2011, pp. 543-544). Participation of young people in accountability mechanisms for Agenda 2030 was recognized as key to "strengthen implementation, improve outcomes, and fulfill the right of young people to participate in shaping and monitoring decisions that affect them" (Davis et al., 2014, p. 3). In the background paper about youth, policies and

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<sup>10</sup> On the relevance of this wide concept of rural, we quote Louise Fox's concept note: "For the next 15 years at least, the majority of youth in SSA and South Asia will live in rural areas (including towns and peri-urban areas)" (Fox, 2018, p. 1).

<sup>11</sup> Seasonality in rural activities allows young people to move within the rural-urban continuum.

<sup>12</sup> Hart (1992, p. 9) defines tokenism as "those instances in which children are apparently given a voice, but in fact have little or no choice about the subject or the style of communicating it, and little or no opportunity to formulate their own opinions".

<sup>13</sup> As defined in Ben White's concept note (2018, p. 64):

"There has indeed been a tendency for policy work, in the 'human capital' and 'youth bulge/ youth dividend' frame, to treat young people as objects of policy and instruments of development, rather than as active subjects and as citizens with rights. 'Instrumentalising' young people in this way parallels the much-criticised tendency to instrumentalise women in 'economic efficiency' (rather than social justice) arguments for gender equality".

<sup>14</sup> For instance, in the case of Afghanistan, youth political organizations – while indeed challenging traditional politics driven by adults – are still very dependent on patronage mechanisms provided by *old guard political networks* to access the political system, particularly outside the capital (Hewad and Johnson, 2014).

institutions, Phillips and Perezniето (2018) study participation as part of governments' abilities to implement effective policies rather than a goal by itself, a perspective we also share.

More importantly, following IFAD's rural structural transformation approach, it is critical to engage youth in decision-making processes because young people are changing their mindsets as territories diversify and integrate into new value chains. This is particularly relevant to young people from rural areas. As put by UNDESA (2003, p. 275): "As youth lifestyles become more divergent and the rate of change increases, and as populations grow more diverse through immigration and mobility, it becomes ever more difficult for those in authority to adequately understand youth. Consulting young people and drawing on their perceptions, knowledge and ideas are essential to both the development of effective public policy and the achievement of positive outcomes."

For measuring public participation, several international organizations and experts rely on the International Association for Public Participation's (IAP2's) Public Participation Spectrum (Head, 2011; OECD, 2017).<sup>15</sup> This spectrum sets levels of public participation based on how the public is able to influence the decision-making process.

- A first level is just informative: citizens are informed about policies relevant to them through communication technologies or face-to-face interaction.
- A second one is consultative: citizens' views are listened to and governments provide feedback on how consultations with the public shaped their decisions.
- A third one is involvement: citizens work with officials, usually in a top-down model, for the inclusion of the former's opinions. Governments provide justification of their decisions and actions to the public.
- A fourth level is collaborative: citizens partner with officials in the whole process, and an iterative dialogue and work agenda are set up.
- And the final level is empowerment: citizens take final decisions that governments enforce as public policy.

Participation can take place in any stage of the policymaking process: situation analysis, policy design and planning, implementation, monitoring or evaluation (UNFPA, 2007, p. 5, OECD, 2017, p. 153).

This spectrum provides both goals for each level of participation and easy messages for the public on what each level means for them. Categorizations based on this spectrum place youth participation on each level in the form of different platforms and techniques for participation, as Head puts it (2011, p. 543).

However, a critical view of the examples of the different participation techniques at each level make us question to what extent these mechanisms are (or could be) effectively available/implementable for rural young people. In some cases, it is difficult to imagine citizen advisory committees or citizens' juries as tools that young people in remote rural areas can use, particularly in developing countries where social norms generally place these rural institutions in the hands of male adults.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, depending on the availability of Internet access and digital capabilities, even simple informative mechanisms could be difficult to implement. This refers to what Kelleher et al. have called "Seldom Heard Young People" or "groups of people who do not have a collective voice and are often under-

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<sup>15</sup> Other classifications for youth participation include Hart's classic eight-level "ladder of participation" for children: manipulation, decoration, tokenism, assigned but informed, consulted and informed, adult-initiated shared decisions with children, child-initiated and directed, and child-initiated shared decisions with adults (Hart, 1992, p. 8). Karsten (2012) managed to categorize up to 36 models elaborated between 1969 and 2012 classifying youth participation, including Hart's and IAP2's. See also Lansdown and O'Kane's (2014) series of booklets for Save the Children on the issue.

<sup>16</sup> On the pertinence of this theoretical framework for rural youth, please see table 2.

represented in consultation or participation activities” (Social Exclusion Task Force, as cited by Community Network for Manchester, 2011, p. 16, quoted by Kelleher et al., 2014, p. 1).

In this paper we specifically look at examples of participation mechanisms through the lens of the rural condition of youth. What development outcomes – if any – have these mechanisms provided them with?

**Table 1.** Levels of public participation

	<b>Inform</b>	<b>Consult</b>	<b>Involve</b>	<b>Collaborate</b>	<b>Empower</b>
<b>Public participation goal</b>	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.
<b>Promise to the public</b>	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.
<b>Example techniques to consider</b>	Fact sheets, websites, open houses	Public comment, focus groups, surveys, public meetings	Workshops, deliberative polling	Citizen advisory committees, consensus-building, participatory decision-making	Citizens' juries, ballots, delegated decisions

Source: IAP2 International Federation (2014) (copyright permission obtained); Head (2011).

## 4. Rural young people face particular problems

Rural young people are still one of the groups least engaged in the policymaking process in the developing world, in spite of all the previous efforts conducted by development actors in the context of implementation of the Millennium Development Goals.<sup>17</sup> Fragility of the economic conditions of young people seems to play a major role for this. In the case of Nigeria, Nlerum and Okorie (2012) found that lack of economic resources is a major impediment to participation in developmental projects: age, marital status, educational level and previous experience in rural development had significant relationship with participation. Insufficient input was the highest (44.54 per cent) constraint to the participants. Individual constraints to participation result in poor conditions for enabling voluntary associations. As a consequence, rural youth organizations are few (OECD, 2018, p. 90)<sup>18</sup> and they traditionally face major challenges when it comes to engaging with civil society, government and institutions: lack of connections with the modern urban contexts, particularly with government and donor staff, makes them prone to early disbanding (DFID, 2010, p. 26).

### Box 1. Peru's National Registry of Youth Organizations

Previous studies have shown the scarcity of rural youth organizations (DFID, 2010; OECD, 2018). However, there are national initiatives that might support a more accurate depiction of how many rural organizations exist. For instance, the National Secretariat of Youth in Peru manages the National Registry of Youth Organizations, a comprehensive database of youth groups in the country. Registration is voluntary but highly promoted by the Secretariat among youth organizations. Organizations must register in any of 17 categories (sport associations, student associations, etc.). The resultant database (updated annually) includes information that helps to identify rural youth organizations, such location, main issue of work or point of contact.

Source: OECD (2017).

In addition, members of rural organizations do not all have the same level of organizational skills, which results in pronounced hierarchies inside these groups: “too often youth movements can be dominated by the most articulate and socially engaged young people, while the more marginalized groups are excluded” (UNDESA, 2003, p. 283). Speaking about the case of Australia, Head (2011, p. 544) shared this opinion, particularly about platforms of political participation:

“a possible concern about this focus on political forums for deliberation and advocacy is that only the more confident young people are likely to become involved, and that the vulnerable or hard-to-reach groups are overlooked. Thus, a focus on formal political or organizational forms of youth leadership could be seen as a rather traditional ‘adult-engendered’ political goal”.

In the case of New Zealand, Nairn et al. found that participatory mechanisms at local councils aimed at young people (both in urban and rural settings), reached only young people with polarized behaviours: “achievers”, or young people with great potential to become leaders; and “troublemakers”, or young people with perceived socialization problems. This selection left “ordinary young people” (the “excluded middle”, as the authors call them) outside their range of action; most of them were not even aware of the opportunities for participation provided by local councils. This selection was wholly implemented by adults (Nairn et al., 2006). These examples point to the fact that participatory

<sup>17</sup> For an early assessment of these efforts, see Working Group for Youth and the MDGs (2014).

<sup>18</sup> Some of the exceptions raised by OECD include the “Network of Young Producers and Agricultural Professionals of Togo” (REJEPPAT) that developed greater lobby capacities to influence for clearing “farmland and supporting rural youth setting up in farming”. Also, the “Asian Farmers’ Association for Sustainable Rural Development” is pushing a bill to systematically include young farmers into policymaking relevant to them (OECD 2018: 90).

mechanisms could produce unexpected consequences creating a dichotomy between elite and non-elite youth. In the case of Ireland, and discussing children's participation, Kelleher et al. (2014, p. 2, quoting Roe & McEvoy, 2011) point out that:

“the common perception is that confident, articulate, socially oriented, older children are more likely to populate formal participatory initiatives, such as youth and school/student councils, and evidence tends to support this (e.g. Carnegie UK Trust, 2008). In Ireland, youth-oriented organizations have reported that middle-class, well educated, articulate young people are most likely to be involved in participation activities and that such young people are not representative of those most in need of services and support”. On the other hand, because of their invisibility, rural youth organizations have not been objects of study to the extent that their urban peers have. Therefore, key evidence gaps are found for this particular issue. While creating new organizations or becoming part of one might not empower youth by itself, voluntary associations help to overcome organizational obstacles and transaction costs that individual young people would face alone otherwise. A good experience of working with existing youth organizations comes from IFAD's Agricultural Value Chains Support Project in Senegal, where IFAD promotes the conversion of youth football clubs into organizations related to economic activities (Box 2).

#### **Box 2. IFAD's “Agricultural Value Chains Support Project”**

According to IFAD's supervision report for the *Projet d'Appui aux Filières Agricoles – Extension in Senegal*, rural youth organizations (particularly the *Associations Sportives et Culturelles*) are the cornerstone of the project's strategy for youth engagement. As a result, young people represent 37 per cent of beneficiaries and 55 per cent of heads of the local councils at the household level that participate in the farmer associations' meetings. Moreover, young women represent 28 per cent of beneficiaries (IFAD, 2017: 6).

On top of these challenges, social norms in traditional rural areas play a major constraining role on participation, particularly for young females. For instance, while in the past few years improvements are clear in basic indicators of wellbeing for young rural women in Latin America (particularly in the school period), rural women between 18 and 22 years old face challenges related to institutional frameworks biased against them (e.g. property laws on land that favoured men). They also do not have access to educational and training programmes to the same extent as their urban peers (Trivelli and Asensio, 2014). Gender-biased norms are stopping rural young women from achieving better outcomes in early years of adulthood. The same results are found by *Young Lives*: while children born after the year 2000 “are more likely to spend their adolescence in school, to postpone entry into the labour force, and to delay marriage and childbearing ... gender becomes a more significant factor during adolescence, affecting boys and girls in different ways at different times” (*Young Lives* 2017).

In spite of that, rural young women are taking actions by themselves to move forward. In a previous study, we found that rural areas in four countries of Latin America are “defeminizing”, that women (particularly young women) born in rural areas are moving to urban settings, a process that started at least 20 years ago (Trivelli and Asensio, 2014). This process shows women resisting the current status quo by moving to urban settings where better “landscapes of opportunities” (Sumberg et al., 2018) are achievable.

Finally, there are institutional challenges associated with the application of existing policies on rural youth. The most important is the assimilation of youth as an urban actor. As stated by OECD on the case of Peru's employment programmes, “although data identify rural youth as a vulnerable group, many programmes in favour of young people have an urban bias” (Centro de Desarrollo de la OCDE, 2017, p. 22). In addition, youth policies tend to be “youth focused” rather than “youth-centred” (Sinclair,

2004, quoted by OECD, 2017, p. 149): young people are objects of public policies rather than agents whose concerns feed the design of policies relevant to them, a trend that is particularly true for rural youth (Vargas-Lundius and Suttie, 2014, p. 51).

Adult-centrism is another impediment to letting young people engage in the public sphere. In the case of rural South Africa, Campbell (Campbell et al., 2009, p. 93) points out that young people cannot engage in HIV programmes because of:

“(i) reluctance by community adults to recognize the potential value of youth inputs, and an unwillingness to regard youth as equals in project structures; (ii) lack of support for meaningful youth participation by external health and welfare agencies involved in the project; and (iii) the failure of the project to provide meaningful incentives to encourage youth involvement”.

Finally many governments engage young people only for “youth-related issues” (such as volunteering, sports and ludic activities) instead of integrating them in a wider range of topics of their concern (employment, sexual and reproductive rights policy, etc.). As Jennings et al. put it, young people should be integrated in activities that promote “meaningful participation”, that is, “activities relevant to their own lives, ones that excite and challenge them and ‘count as real’” (Jennings et al., 2006, p. 43). This is related to the broader topic of creating an “enabling environment”, that is, one that “maximizes their assets, agency, access to services, and opportunities, as well as their ability to avoid risks, stay safe and secure, and be protected. An enabling environment encourages and recognizes youth while promoting their social and emotional competence to thrive” (YouthPower, 2017b).

## 5. Initiatives for youth inclusion through participatory mechanisms

Programmes, initiatives and techniques specifically working on rural youth participation are limited in numbers. As we will see in this document, there are many similar approaches to promoting participation by youth (workshops, councils, parliaments, etc.), although no specific component related to rural youth. This is particularly striking given the wide consensus in the literature about the need to include hard-to-reach young people. Therefore, our approach aims to review both specific institutional arrangements promoting participation and holistic interventions working on other topics, to determine what elements could trigger youth inclusion and development outcomes in rural areas.

### 5.1 Programmes and initiatives related to participation

We reviewed 54 mechanisms specifically related to youth participation in Southern Asia, sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America (see appendix). Methods included literature review supported by keywords searches in selected companies' databases: mainly ProQuest, EBSCO and the Education Resources Information Center. We also checked this information against Youth Policy's comprehensive database of 196 countries, which includes data about youth organizations and engagement up until 2014;<sup>19</sup> the Commonwealth's Youth Development Index (CYDI), published in 2016; and the Global Youth Wellbeing Index (GYWI), published in 2017.<sup>20</sup> Some of the mechanisms reviewed included those specified in table 2. To avoid overlapping with Lauren Phillips and Paola Pereznieto's (2018) paper on youth institutions, we do not cover ministries, government departments or similar institutions, although

<sup>19</sup> See Youth Policy (2018). “Factsheets”. Available at: [www.youthpolicy.org/factsheets](http://www.youthpolicy.org/factsheets)

<sup>20</sup> While these two indexes provide valuable insights into aspects of youth involvement in the public sphere, their definitions of participation are very structured towards electoral participation. For instance, CYDI uses “electoral education” as one of its three indicators for political participation, while GYWI uses five indicators for civic participation, including democracy level and voting age.

some indirect references to these bodies may have been included to the extent that they include some sort of participatory mechanism.

The main challenge for this review was to find neutral and well-informed reviews on the functioning of these participatory programmes. As few of these mechanisms have gone through evaluations, laudatory presentations of the programmes were ubiquitous, particularly from media articles and official websites.

As we will see, many of the mechanisms under review have components related to various levels of participation. Therefore, we will mention components of those mechanisms whenever it is relevant. In order to avoid oversimplification, we do not try to label these mechanisms as exclusively belonging to one specific level of participation.



**Table 2.** Examples of mechanisms related to each level of participation, challenges for and advantages of their application in rural settings

	<b>Informing</b>	<b>Consulting</b>	<b>Collaborating</b>	<b>Empowering</b>
Examples	<p>Open house</p> <p>Observing youth caucuses in parliaments</p> <p>Transparent communication with policymakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• radio</li> <li>• website/online</li> <li>• television</li> <li>• newspapers</li> <li>• fact sheets</li> </ul>	<p>Deliberative polling</p> <p>Survey</p> <p>Workshop</p> <p>Focus group</p> <p>Public comment</p> <p>Public meeting</p> <p>Public hearing</p> <p>Youth commission/council</p>	<p>Co-facilitated and co-conducted consultation</p> <p>Internship/fellowship programme in ministries or other public institutions</p> <p>Youth advisory board</p> <p>Part of the steering committee</p> <p>Collaboration in research:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• designing indicators and methodology</li> <li>• data gathering</li> <li>• report writing</li> <li>• reviewing</li> </ul>	<p>Youth-initiated and -led (peer) consultation</p> <p>Youth-initiated and -led information campaigns</p> <p>Youth parliament</p> <p>Delegated decisions and Implementation</p> <p>Youth-organized and youth-managed small-scale programmes with full responsibility for implementation</p> <p>Independent research</p>
Problems for application in different types of rural settings	<p><u>Traditional rural settings:</u></p> <p>In-presence mechanisms (open houses, participation in youth caucuses): high costs of transportation and accommodation. Fact sheets and newspapers have limitations in reaching rural areas; websites or online communications depend on access and use of such means in rural areas and on the digital literacy of the rural population (plus language barriers for several indigenous communities).</p> <p><u>More diversified and integrated rural settings:</u></p> <p>No major challenges.</p>	<p>Traditional rural settings:</p> <p>High costs of opportunity: attending in-presence gatherings might reduce time invested in labour or household activities.</p> <p>Social norms: conflicts with older generations and spouses over participation in “youth-only” activities.</p> <p>Elite capture by the most empowered young people.</p> <p><u>More diversified and integrated rural settings:</u></p> <p>No major challenges.</p>	<p><u>Traditional rural settings:</u></p> <p>In some contexts, less human capital available to apply for internship/fellowship programmes or collaborate in research. High costs of transportation and accommodation.</p> <p>Elite capture by the most empowered young people.</p> <p><u>More diversified and integrated rural settings:</u></p> <p>Marginalization associated with urban contexts (such as illicit economies, gang membership) may stop youth from participating. Depending on types of peri-urban settings, absence of human capital may be an issue.</p>	<p><u>Traditional rural settings:</u></p> <p>Less human capital available to manage campaigns, projects, research. High costs of training. Elite capture by the most empowered young people.</p> <p><u>More diversified and integrated rural settings:</u></p> <p>Marginalization associated with urban contexts (such as illicit economies, gang membership) may stop youth from participating. Depending on types of peri-urban settings, absence of human capital may be an issue.</p>

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<p>Advantages for application in different types of rural settings</p>	<p><u>Traditional rural settings:</u> Communication with policymakers: promising advances regarding using new ICT for communication in recent years.</p> <p><u>More diversified and integrated rural settings:</u> Easy transportation to major urban centres. Means of communication widely available.</p>	<p><u>Traditional rural settings:</u> Technology may support strategies for virtual feedback and deliberation.</p> <p><u>More diversified and integrated rural settings:</u> Economic connections to urban settings reduce opportunity costs of attending meetings. Less social pressure to avoid these platforms.</p>	<p><u>Traditional rural settings:</u> Suited for mechanisms that require short-term training (how to conduct consultations, to participate on youth advisory boards or steering committees, etc.).</p> <p><u>More diversified and integrated rural settings:</u> Easier transportation to major urban centres. Fluid communication with participants.</p>	<p><u>Traditional rural settings:</u> Suited for long-term interventions working on skills formation and assets dotation at the same time. High sense of ownership among participants.</p> <p><u>More diversified and integrated rural settings:</u> High sense of ownership among participants.</p>
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Note: While IAP2 includes “involvement” as a differentiated stage in the levels of involvement of youth people in decision-making process, we will follow the OECD’s four-level interpretation of this framework.

Sources: OECD (2017, p. 150); elaboration of advantages and problems, authors’ own elaboration based on OECD (2017, p. 150)

While there are many mechanisms available for youth participation in the developing world, many of them promoted by supranational bodies or development agencies, the vast majority of these do not have a distinct approach to rural youth. Similarly, almost none of these mechanisms include specific provisions regarding engagement with hard-to-reach youth. However, some of the most rural countries in the world – according to the most recent update from the World Bank (2018) – have national and regional institutions working with youth in participatory ways: Papua New Guinea, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka (youth parliaments), Nepal (United States Embassy Youth Council), Cambodia and Kenya (youth councils), to name a few. On the other hand, countries that have recently faced political transitions or the end of armed conflicts have been targeted by international organizations to promote youth involvement in decision-making processes: for instance, the work of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in Nepal, agencies of the United Nations in Sri Lanka and the work of the International Republican Institute in The Gambia.<sup>21</sup>

Sub-Saharan Africa, Southern Asia, the Pacific Islands and the Caribbean have the most substantial experiences in this regard (see appendix).

#### **a) Informing mechanisms**

Informing mechanisms are the basic requirement for participation: they let young people know that some policy includes them as beneficiaries or policy objects. For the purpose of informing them, means of communication include online information, television, radio, printed materials, etc. While the provision of information may be limited to a one-off interaction, the use of social networks and electronic bulletins might support a long-term strategy to engage youth on topics relevant to them.

Informing mechanisms are very prominent in most of the initiatives under review. Therefore, they run websites and manage social networks. Most of the mechanisms seem to realize that young people increasingly have a distinct relationship with information and communication technologies and they act accordingly (Commonwealth, 2016). In their websites, some even include instructions about how to access the different services they provide to youth: for instance, Sri Lanka's National Youth Services Council (NYSC)<sup>22</sup> and the Philippines' National Youth Commission (NYC)<sup>23</sup> run websites with full information on courses, programmes and services available to young people. Both institutions are very active, according to the activities promoted in their websites. In Jordan, UNDP supported the implementation of the Youth Participation in Local Governance project, whose objective "was to increase youth political participation and civic engagement in local governance ... using an online portal and game on local governance" (Knox, 2014, p. 6). While the construction of the portal engaged youth leaders in the country, full ownership of the tool is still pending: when the evaluation took place, only 193 users were registered.

While face-to-face mechanisms for information present challenges for rural young people because of their high costs, opportunities related to the expansion of information technologies to engage young people are vast. Moreover, even some of the most excluded populations inside rural territories are creating new bonds to ICT in unexpected ways. In a previous study about rural women in Latin America, we found that while "the use of the Internet presents gender biases in content and functions,

<sup>21</sup> Check: Coker, 2017. "Gambia: National Youth Parliament Holds First National Sitting" *Daily Observer*; Banjul [Banjul] 13 July 2017.

<sup>22</sup> According to YouthPolicy (2014), the Council "delivers extensive programs including youth awards, education, sports, media, international youth affairs, skills and training. It has close links to government ministries and receives government funding." More information: National Youth Services Council. "Vision and mission". Available at: [http://www.nysc.lk/vission\\_e.php](http://www.nysc.lk/vission_e.php) (last updated 4 July 2018).

<sup>23</sup> According to the International Labour Organization, some of NYC's successful youth employment interventions include information provision such as the Government Internship Program by which the Commission "arranges for other government agencies and private companies to hire out-of-school, unemployed youth as interns who receive a monthly stipend that is 75% of the minimum wage" (Asia Pacific Youth Employment Network, 2018). More information: National Youth Commission. "NYC Vision and Mission". Available at <http://nyc.gov.ph/vision-mission/> (last updated 23 May 2018).

... it is relatively well spread among rural women in the segment of younger age. Unlike their mothers and grandmothers, we do not find in this group a negative psychological barrier to new technologies. Concerning this issue, to be young seems to be a stronger brand identity than being rural or being a woman" (Asensio, 2012, p. 20, our translation). Regarding ICT use, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Sri Lanka has partnered with the NYSC, Cisco and Citi to "conduct e-learning programmes in 20 locations across Sri Lanka to build on national priorities placed on strengthening the knowledge on Information and Communication Technology skills among youth" (UNDP Sri Lanka, 2018).

In Timor Leste, USAID funded the Youth Engagement to Promote Stability Program. Based on a post-conflict approach, the three-year project had a media component: creating radio programmes (broadcast in 13 districts) targeting youth, which included "training and mentoring to build the capacity of community radio stations" (Stine, 2015, p. 4). However, the final evaluation found that trained radio volunteers had a high rate of quitting the job afterwards and the project lacked a strategy to engage youth as radio listeners.

### **b) Consulting mechanisms**

Consulting mechanisms represent a two-way kind of interaction with young people: officials listen to young people's voices and they provide feedback on how they manage to include those opinions in the policy cycle. The most common consulting mechanisms include national and international meetings, workshops and youth councils.

In-person communication is a frequent kind of interaction promoted by regional organizations in order to consult youth. National meetings, and meetings of national youth representatives abroad, are common in the framework of international organizations such as the Commonwealth, the African Union (AU), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

For instance, the African Union organized the Continental Youth Consultation on Transitional Justice aimed at pointing out "challenges preventing youth effective engagement as active agents in peace and Transitional Justice processes and for the African youth to make their contribution to the draft African Union Transitional Justice Policy". (M2 Presswire 2016) To draw up its 10-year human rights strategy, the AU conducted four regional youth consultations in North, East, West and Southern Africa, where young people could express their opinions on issues such as "young women's rights; governance, peace, security and migration; inclusion, diversity management and popular participation; and employment and mobility" (M2 Presswire 2016b).

The AU's proactivity on youth involvement is in response to a binding legal framework. The African Youth Charter, created in 2006, regulates AU Member states' obligations towards youth. Article 11 specifically deals with youth participation. It includes provisions to "guarantee the participation of youth in parliament and other decision-making bodies in accordance with the prescribed laws" and to "facilitate the creation or strengthening of platforms for youth participation in decision-making at local, national, regional, and continental levels of governance". Indeed, the African Youth Charter includes provisions that integrate young people at most levels of the participatory scale designed by IAP2.

On the other hand, the Commonwealth Youth Council (CYC) – the "largest youth-led organization in the world" according to its website<sup>24</sup> – also organizes meetings of its regional branches (it has regional chapters in the Caribbean, Africa and the Pacific). For instance, in 2015, the Caribbean Regional Youth Council, part of the CYC, organized a meeting between youth organizations in the Caribbean and government ministers to "discuss policy responses to issues such as youth employment and

<sup>24</sup> See <http://thecommonwealth.org/commonwealth-youth-council>.

entrepreneurship, participation in civic and political processes, the role of young people in peace building, and the professionalisation of the youth work sector.” (Pacnews 2015)<sup>25</sup>

In 2016, SAARC countries organized the SAARC Regional Dialogue on Promoting Youth Participation in the Implementation of SDGs, whose main goal was to “share best practices and experiences across SAARC countries in policy development and involve young people in this process” (Himalayan Times 2016).<sup>26</sup> ASEAN also organizes this kind of meetings. None of these organizations (CYC, SAARC and ASEAN) has a distinct rural youth approach in its interventions.

Some projects are also related to consulting rural young people. IFAD’s grant for the project Promoting Young People’s Entrepreneurship has among its objectives:

“to fund national policy dialogue workshops to discuss the best strategies in favor of the young rural population in the countries and territories of operation of the Programme. These workshops would involve representatives of rural youth participating in the Fund’s projects, leaders of associations representing the interests of the rural poor, national and local authorities and decision makers, as well as specialists in the design of policies and investments for the rural sector. Up to ten national policy dialogue workshops would be funded, bringing together up to 200 young rural men and women, and at least 50 decision makers, specialists and technical staff of IFAD funded operations”.<sup>27</sup>

In Zimbabwe, MercyCorps implemented the Trusting in Youth in Zimbabwe Project (TYZP), which has as an objective to “increase youth’s ability to constructively engage their communities and government (both local and national) on issues that affect them” (MercyCorps, 2015, p. 5). The locations of the project included the rural district of Buhera. Regarding engagement in their communities and with national offices (one of the components of the project), activities included training, leadership workshops and meetings with representatives of national institutions. According to the project’s final report, as a result of the intervention (MercyCorps, 2015, p. 46):

“there was an 18% significant change in terms of a decrease in risky behavior such as alcohol drinking” and “through the 16 community reconciliation projects completed, with an average of 150 youth participating from the 8 wards, youth can now constructively engage with community members in issues affecting their lives. They were able to identify critical issues affecting their communities and were able to utilize various resources for the benefit of the community”.

On the same note, Reunión Especializada en Agricultura Familiar (REAF), supported by several institutions such as FAO and IFAD, set up its own working group with promising young leaders to discuss issues related to family agriculture. REAF provided courses in the format of international meetings to “train them and identify the main challenges for the permanence of this cohort in rural areas and for the formation of an agenda that guides public action” (REAF, 2016, p. 16). According to REAF, young people which went through this programme are now assuming leadership positions, bringing their own ideas about rural development and generational approaches to the policy cycle in their countries (REAF, 2016, p. 16).

The rural dialogue groups (*grupos de diálogo rural*) of the Latin American Center for Rural Development (RIMISP) have also become spaces for raising awareness, in the public and private sectors, about rural youth issues. These groups, based in Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico and Peru, give voice to rural young people and open up methods of dialogue with rural youth organizations (RIMISP, n.d.). Another way of consulting is “youth councils”, where young people make their voices heard before governments in an institutionalized fashion. OECD describes them as

<sup>25</sup> Pacnews (2015) “Caribbean youth priorities take centre stage at ministerial meeting in Antigua and Barbuda”. April 28<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>26</sup> Himalayan Times (2016) “Nepal hosts SAARC regional dialogue”. March 24<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> Rahul Antao, IFAD representative, email message to authors, 30 April 2018.

“umbrella organisations that represent and co-ordinate youth organisations” across a given country (OECD, 2017, p. 151). Although formed of civil society members, councils are regulated by law and they usually perform functions assigned to them by the state (mainly being interlocutor on policies regarding youth). Councils exist at both the national (Fiji, Rwanda and The Gambia) and subnational levels (Pakistan, Philippines, Peru), and many of them seem to have functions resembling ministries or institutes of youth.

In Peru, regional councils of youth (COREJUs, in Spanish) are subnational institutions attached to the regional governments that represent the voice of young people in local policymaking. Some of them aim for participation of hard-to-reach youth: for instance, the COREJU in the region of San Martín has a representative from each province, including rural and semirural ones (Centro de Desarrollo de la OECD, 2017, pp. 133-138). However, according to the OECD, COREJUs’ impact is limited: it is extremely dependent on the governor’s political favour, and they lack autonomy and their own budgets (Centro de Desarrollo de la OECD, 2017, p. 21). On the other hand, problems in the effectiveness of local youth councils to support disaster risk reduction policies are found in the Philippines, mainly because they do not give substantial roles to youth on this issue (Fernandez and Shaw, 2013).

In Cambodia, the Commune Youth Group project, implemented by Cooperation for Development of Cambodia (CDC) and sponsored by UNICEF, aimed to support youth involvement in the local council of Kampong Thom Province. Working with 12 youth groups (12 to 15 young people each), the project ran elections to choose youth representatives on the local council. The representatives were also formally allocated a small budget (approximately US\$500) and received training and skills formation by CDC (Ruiz, 2011, pp. 46-47). The evaluation of the project points out that impact was reflected in “knowledge gained, skills learned and attitudes developed”, particularly in communication abilities and social confidence (Ruiz, 2011, p. 53).

Summing up, consulting mechanisms (particularly councils) face problems related to irregular political support by authorities. On the other hand, while workshops and meetings are a common tool used to raise young people’s voices, they may become a one-off interaction with no substantial impact on youth lives, unless they are attached to long-term programmes promoting leadership, such as those of REAF and Zimbabwe’s TYZP.

### **c) Collaborating mechanisms**

These mechanisms relate to setting up an iterative dialogue with youth as a result of direct joint work between government and youth. Not only is there a round of consultations with youth, and feedback from governments on the inclusion of these opinions, but there is also continuous interaction with them as co-implementers of a given policy.

For instance, UNFPA used to work with youth advisory panels in many countries (the Philippines, South Africa, etc.) and it actively promoted their creation (UNFPA, n.d.a). Moreover, UNFPA had its own Global Youth Advisory Panel (GYAP), as a mechanism “to dialogue with youth organizations and networks and to seek their advice on strategic actions to better address the needs of young people”. GYAP constitution was very sensitive to include “specific vulnerable youth populations to ensure that their concerns and voices are reflected in the discussions of the panel” (UNFPA, 2009).

Concerning rural youth, UNFPA’s Pakistan Youth Advisory Panel had a significant proportion of rural youth members in 2007: 10 out of 17 members came from rural areas. They were chosen for a two-year period. According to its participation guide, “members were recruited through nominations and outreach through provincial and district staff and implementing partners of the youth program”. Among the functions performed, there were “local consultation meetings for the establishment of UNFPA’s AWP’s [annual work plans]”, “advocacy and awareness-raising activities for the World Youth Day, the World Population Day” and “monitoring of Youth Friendly Centres and ... various other project monitoring meetings with CO [country office] staff” (UNFPA, n.d.a).

One of the main challenges for implementing collaboration mechanisms in rural areas is the possible lack of human capital among rural youth to properly interact with adult co-implementers. On that note, a good strategy is found in IFAD's Rural Youth Vocational Training, Employment and Entrepreneurship Support Project in Mali, an initiative that supports vocational training (which improves levels of human capital) while also including producer organizations in the project formulation: rural (youth) producers are included in the project's steering committee and provide supervision (IFAD n.d.). According to the President's report (IFAD, 2013, p. 2):

"Producer organizations will benefit from specific support in response to the need for young people to be better taken into account by their elders and potential partners in agricultural value chains. Producer organizations were closely involved in project formulation, will be represented as stakeholders on the steering committee and will take part in project supervision. In addition, they will be tasked with a number of facilitation and training activities."

As participation mechanisms become more complex at this level, human capital variables become determinant to explain the actual participation of certain groups among youth. Therefore, elite capture by the most empowered youth (the "achievers", those that have a record of good performance at school, in community institutions, etc.) becomes particularly a challenge: they are more likely to apply for participative positions and be admitted. Adult bias towards "high-performing youth" plays a role too: adults recruit achievers to panels, committees, etc., rather than those who better represent their communities' exclusionary situation. Therefore, it is important that adult co-participants in such mechanisms are familiar with and sensitive to the challenges of participation and genuinely see their work as collaboration with excluded youth.

#### **d) Empowering mechanisms**

These mechanisms delegate decision-making into young people's hands. Initiatives are directed and projects are executed by youth, although some structural limitations (budget constraints, etc.) may still be in place.

Youth parliaments seem to be one of the most common features of policies promoting youth participation in developing countries. Regular parliaments have low levels of representation of youth: according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), "when 'young' is defined as under 30, only one country, Norway, breaks the 10 per cent barrier. Two thirds of single and lower houses of parliament have 2 per cent or fewer young parliamentarians. All upper houses have less than 6 per cent, with three quarters electing no young parliamentarians at all" (IPU, 2014, p. 2).

Talking about youth parliaments, the IPU recognizes that, "according to the responses, youth parliaments in 14 countries (40%) enjoy a formal affiliation with the national parliament. However, the rest are informal and not affiliated formally to national parliaments – even though parliamentarians and parliamentary staff are involved in some of the organizing and the parliament building itself is used for meetings. Rather, primary organizing responsibility lies with non-governmental organizations, government ministries, and schools and other local authorities" (IPU, 2014, p. 18).<sup>28</sup> Their functions included deliberation, awareness-raising and political empowerment.

We have reviewed seven experiences of youth parliaments. It was surprising that most youth parliaments do not tackle the issue of rurality explicitly. In addition, some of them seem to have informing rather than empowering effects: they educate young people on how the real parliament works, rather than trying to create a new structure that informs policymaking. However, in Kenya and the Philippines, youth parliaments aim to set up the youth agenda and influence policy in the upper house, respectively (IPU, 2014, p. 19).

<sup>28</sup> Among the countries under scrutiny there are both developed and developing ones. The data do not disaggregate the two categories.

Sri Lanka's Youth Parliament (made up of 335 members) has been praised for engaging youth people in the policymaking process. Not only does the institution apply electoral procedures to select its members ("500 000 members of youth organizations and clubs across Sri Lanka elect them in district-wide polls" according to OECD, 2017, p. 154) but the institution has been recognized for letting young people "autonomously participat[e] in the first step of the policy cycle (situation analysis) and [be] consulted in the second step (policy design and planning). It includes young people in national decision-making in a representative way and enjoys strong political support in Sri Lanka" (OECD, 2017, p. 154).

However, looking at all the cases as a whole, and contrary to what is stated by OECD, the youth parliament experiences do not seem to fully realize their mission so far, as real problems in the selection of vulnerable youth and informing national policymaking have not been explicitly tackled.

IFAD has supported the implementation of youth-led initiatives. The Global Youth Innovation Network (GYIN), sponsored by IFAD, is a youth-led participatory platform in West and Central Africa for young entrepreneurs and rural microenterprises. Its mission is to "establish a global network of young rural and urban entrepreneurs, with the ultimate aim of contributing to poverty reduction by providing opportunities for young entrepreneurs to serve as agents of change through innovation, entrepreneurship, leadership and self-employment" (Vargas-Lundius and Suttie, 2014, p. 53). Some of their chapters are very active: GYIN Gambia, for instance (Box 3).

### **Box 3. GYIN Gambia**

Among its activities, GYIN Gambia includes a national summer camp (Entrepreneurship, Leadership and Information Technology) whose objective is to train future rural mentors "sharing knowledge and experience on entrepreneurship, agribusiness and youth development issues; seeking business opportunities and networking, and to design a rural youth employment survey plan" (The Point, 2017). It also organizes the Youth Awards to recognize entrepreneurship among young people who attended the camp (Daily Observer 2017). GYIN Gambia also runs various social media accounts with continuous updates on its work.

On the other hand, IFAD's Community-Based Natural Resource Management Programme (CBNRMP) in Nigeria also points to the constitution of a widely representative youth-led forum. It:

"promoted the creation or the strengthening of youth-only groups. The project facilitated the creation of a youth forum called Youth Agriculture Foundation (YIAF). The YIAF was the first network of agro-enterprising youths in the region, with a nine-member Board of Trustees, one representing each state of the region. It became a platform for promoting and supporting sustainable youth agribusiness, a peer review forum among youth agro-entrepreneurs, and a platform for youth engagement in policy dialogue with government and other institutions. At the programme completion date, the YIAF had 880 members".<sup>29</sup>

In Sierra Leone, the Restless Development initiative describes itself as the "leading youth-led development agency placing young people at the forefront of change and development in Sierra Leone". One of its specific goals is about civic participation so that "young people are included in the development process, resulting in government policies that are both beneficial and accountable to young people and all of its citizens" (Musa and Gegbe, n.d.). The initiative has worked on the issue of rural youth and participation explicitly, and it finds that the main problem in Sierra Leone is the early departure of the most articulate and innovative young people from rural areas to the capital, a void that

<sup>29</sup> Rahul Antao, IFAD representative, email message to authors, 30 April 2018.



is filled by adults over 35 years old who feel less compelled to challenge the traditional gerontocracy of the countryside (see Restless Development, n.d.).

While empowering mechanisms are, ideally, the best options for youth engagement, levels of human capital available to run such complex programmes may not be available in all cases, particularly among isolated rural youth without enough assets and skills.

## 5.2 Programmes and initiatives related to cross-sectoral issues

Cross-sectoral initiatives do not work specifically on participation but they do promote engagement of young people in decision-making process as part of holistic strategies working on skills formation and asset provision.

Our review of cross-sectoral initiatives showed two distinct characteristics that could complement interventions promoting public participation of rural youth. First, the acquisition of skills, particularly “soft skills” or “character skills”,<sup>30</sup> is an important component of these strategies. Character skills are key for public participation, as they are the basis of any kind of deliberative dialogue with others. Second, these strategies aim to improve collaborations between youth and adults through the creation of “intergenerational partnerships”, a key component of a constructive approach to change biased institutional environments that place decision-making in the hands of male adults. Participation must not necessarily collide with the roles of adults in a rural space, but rather it could trigger complementarity between old and new generations.

### Soft skills

Cross-sectoral initiatives put emphasis on developing skills in young people, both at the academic and technical levels but also so-called soft skills. The latter are particularly relevant to public participation. As pointed out by YouthPower,<sup>31</sup> soft skills “refer to a broad set of skills, behaviours, and personal qualities that enable people to effectively navigate their environment, relate well with others, perform well, and achieve their goals. These skills are applicable across sectors and complement the acquisition of other skills such as technical and academic skills” (Gates et al., 2016, p. 1).

Educational systems in rural areas are critical to achieve higher levels of participation through the promotion of soft skills. However, as Microlinks puts it in the case of employment entry, it is not clear “how youth gain knowledge and develop foundational skills given the difficulties facing rural education systems ... and when; how to gauge the interest within governments to integrate soft skills into basic education; and to what degree other sectors – such as education and health – should be engaged” (Microlinks, 2017). Higher levels of participation, such as assemblies and consultative bodies, require soft skills that rural education – usually based on a minimalist approach to provide the basics to students – may not guarantee. Some of these soft skills include interpersonal skills (social and communication skills) including communication (verbal, non-verbal and listening), assertiveness, conflict resolution and negotiation strategies; youth engagement in an inclusive, intentional, mutually respectful partnership between youth and adults, opportunities for prosocial involvement in the school or community, self-perceived value and recognition, among others (YouthPower, 2017c, pp. 2-5).

On this note, IFAD’s Empowering Indigenous Youth and Their Communities to Defend and Promote their Food Heritage<sup>32</sup> promotes the formation of leadership through the delivering of:

<sup>30</sup> Following Heckman and Kautz (2013) we prefer the term “character skills” to “soft skills”; however, as most interventions under review in this paper still refer to them as soft skills, we use both concepts interchangeably.

<sup>31</sup> YouthPower is a USAID project that gathers evidence on what works for youth development, particularly on the economy, health and education. About its approach, see YouthPower (n.d.).

<sup>32</sup> The project has just started activities, so there has been no delivery of results yet.

“training modules with subject matter specialists to empower indigenous youth on selected topics; build on youth capacities through workshops and trainings after the modules; facilitate and enable youth leadership to give young people a voice through the creation of spaces for policy dialogue, representation in [Indigenous Terra Madre] decision making processes, inclusion in the Slow Food Youth Network (SFYN), and facilitation of South-South exchanges through events and online media; and, organize meetings and events at local, national and international levels, including at least 3 regional events and at least 1 international event”.<sup>33</sup>

This emphasis on the education system’s contributions to the formation of character skills is key to a successful participative model. Ideally, schools should help young people in the transition to early adulthood, a particular stage between 15 and 20 years old when young people start their socialization in the market and higher education spheres and when exposure to education may place in question social norms affecting particularly vulnerable groups such as young women. In the cases of rural young women from Ghana and India, Arnot et al. found that “transitions to adulthood have been seen, at least in many African contexts, as a ‘cumulative process of social integration into family and community’ that differed from the individualistic singular, linear and seemingly more stable transitions to adulthood that have dominated Western paradigms in the past” (Nsamenang, 2002, quoted by Arnot et al., 2012, p. 193). The authors continue: “the introduction of formal schooling may shift those transitions towards the more individualized, independent-minded and autonomous patterns of the global North, complicating adolescence whilst at the same time offering new freedoms in terms of equitable relationships, affinities and new relational worlds” (Arnot et al., 2012, p. 193).

In Somalia, MercyCorps’s Somali Youth Leaders Initiative provided school young leaders with training in conflict analysis, peacebuilding, team-building and leadership (MercyCorps, 2016, p. 11). Youth leaders then “apply their leadership, teambuilding and mobilization skills to work on concrete issues at the local level that are drawn from their own daily experiences” (MercyCorps, 2016, p. 11). As a result of the initiative, young people who went through the civic activities of the programme were “17% more likely to believe that lodging a complaint with a local official was an effective way of bring about a desired change. The program not only increased the perceptions that these nonviolent actions were effective but also the likelihood of youth actually employing them” (MercyCorps, 2016, p. 17).

### **Intergenerational partnerships**

As Checkoway puts it, one of the key components of youth participation is “efforts by young people to organize around issues of their choice, by adults to involve young people in community agencies, and by youth and adults to join together in intergenerational partnerships” (Checkoway, 2011, p. 341). Engaging adults in horizontal collaboration schemes with young people is fundamental in rural areas where social norms place responsibilities mainly on male adults (Jennings et al., 2006, pp. 52-53).

On the intergenerational approach, the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) drew up a five-component framework for the application of the intergenerational approach in programmes (ICRW, 2003, pp. 2-4):

1. “Recognition of the interdependence of adolescent and adult lives.”
2. “Common understanding and respect for each generation’s unique experiences through open dialogue.”
3. “Both generations are key stakeholders whose buy-in, ownership and participation are important for the project’s success.”
4. “Recognition that younger and older adolescents have different needs and that different adults play supportive roles at various stages in adolescents’ lives.”

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<sup>33</sup> Rahul Antao, IFAD representative, email message to authors, 30 April 2018.

5. “Sensitization and training are important for both generations.”

In its checklist for “Positive Youth Development Practices”, YouthPower recommends the importance of “healthy relationships and bonding” with both adult role models and peers for the implementation of programmes (YouthPower, 2017c, p. 3). Those role models might come from the family: in cases of financial inclusion in Ghana and Kenya, Johnson et al. found that parents supported their children to save money, “facilitating access to make deposits at the financial institution or schools, and helping to build trust in formalized saving” (Johnson et al., 2015, p. 14). Another approach is used by Mastercard Foundation in projects related to its Youth Forward Initiative. While the initiative’s core issues are youth unemployment in Ghana and Uganda in the agriculture and construction sectors, it also uses a holistic approach that includes mentorships and coaching, and close collaboration with youth organizations.<sup>34</sup> The Creating Opportunities for Rural Youth (CORY) Consortium also sets up a mentorship structure to support “their entrepreneurial capacities for enhanced peer learning and access to complementary business development services”.<sup>35</sup> Some of the collaborative mechanisms explained in the previous section also point to this kind of synergies between adults and rural youth.

Some examples include the programmes of the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education, which provide rural youth in five developing countries with “positive role models, mentors and counsellors from among the community elders and leaders” while at the same time providing “spaces – youth camps, clubs, after-school centres, workshops – places where young people could interact with their peers, draw strength from each other, develop self-discipline and a stronger sense of social responsibility, learn to value themselves more, discuss common concerns, and discover how they could take action together” (UNESCO, 2014, pp. 5-6).

Rikolto (formerly known as Veco Andino) has worked on youth in the cocoa and coffee value chains in Peru and Ecuador. In its final report, it recognizes that intergenerational conflicts persisted between members of producer organizations, and that organizations still lacked a “youth-centred” approach similar to the gender approach implemented in previous years. Rikolto proposed a way forward by complementing young people’s abilities (mostly those related to information technologies) with the traditional leadership of adults (Rikolto, 2017, pp. 42-43).

Finally, IFAD’s Agricultural Value Chains Support Project in Senegal encourages farmer organizations participating in the project to promote young and/or female representatives, thus encouraging mixed-age participation. As we mentioned previously, a substantial number of young people (55 per cent) are leading the representation of their households in the farmer associations.

## 6. Challenges and opportunities for rural young people’s participation

In traditional rural areas, remoteness, low density of population, less frequent in-person interactions, seasonality and migration have all been important elements in the configuration of challenges to participation mechanisms as framed by the literature on public participation. However, the negative impacts of these challenges are being mitigated thanks to the reconfiguration of the relations between urban and rural areas in the context of structural rural transformation and the advancement of information and communication technologies.

<sup>34</sup> Among the projects under this approach are “Driving Youth-Led New Agribusiness and Microenterprise” (DYNAMIC) and “Youth Empowerment through Agriculture” (Y.E.T.A.) in Uganda. Also the “Next Generation Cocoa Program” (MASO) in Ghana. Meredith Lee, Mastercard Foundation representative, email message to authors, December 20<sup>th</sup> 2017.

<sup>35</sup> See <https://agricinghana.com/2014/02/27/ifad-grant-of-us1-95million-to-cory/>.

Increasingly, there is diversification in the urban-rural continuum as well as more connections between urban and rural settings as a result of rural transformation. This paves the way for the creation of mentoring mechanisms and horizontal partnerships between urban and rural actors.

In the case of alliances, Young Professionals for Rural Development (YPARD) in Peru has been working with young people from rural areas in a sort of urban-rural partnership by which college students in Lima combine efforts with young leaders in the countryside for the joint formulation of development projects. In Kenya, the local chapter of YPARD was “the main youth partner in the design and launch of the National Youth Agribusiness Strategy 2017-2021” alongside Kenya’s Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries and subnational governments (YPARD, 2018, p. 7).

The Swades Foundation in India also works in a model that engages “corporates, young urban India, not-for-profit organizations and governments” for the empowerment of rural areas. Its strategy, named Engage, Empower, Execute and Exit, aims to engage rural communities with urban stakeholders thus “(empowering) communities to execute programs that transform their own lives, enabling us to exit and allowing them to serve as role models and change agents for the rest of the country”.<sup>36</sup> The organization manages a team of 1,600 people, most of whom are volunteers.

### Information and communication technologies

Social media are widespread and so are mobile and Internet connections in rural areas, particularly in peri-urban zones and rural towns. According to Jenny Aker in her background paper on ICT, “mobile phone coverage has expanded rapidly in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, from minimal networks in the late 1990s to a point where over 70 percent of the population of sub-Saharan Africa is covered by the mobile network” (GSMA, 2013, quoted by Aker, 2018, p. 2).

According to data provided exclusively from the project After Access<sup>37</sup> about five Latin American countries (Argentina, Colombia, Guatemala, Paraguay and Peru), 80.5 per cent of rural young people between 15 and 20 years old and 82.3 per cent between 21 and 30 years old have a mobile device, of which 69.7 per cent and 51.8 per cent, respectively, are smartphones. Users of the Internet are in the majority in both age cohorts: 85.4 per cent and 70.6 per cent, respectively. The same applies to users of social networks: 87.8 per cent and 62.2 per cent, respectively. Among rural youth between 21 and 30 years old, mobile phones are used mainly for instant messaging, social networks and newsfeeds, which open up a world of possibilities for engaging young people in participation mechanisms (Aguero, 2018). In Africa,<sup>38</sup> data from the same project show that 51.8 per cent of rural young people have a mobile phone and 33.4 per cent of those mobile phone are smartphones; in Asia,<sup>39</sup> 58.4 per cent have a mobile phone, of which 42.2 per cent are smartphones.

So far there is no comprehensive specific literature review on how social media and new information technologies contribute to participation (and eventually empowerment) of rural young people.<sup>40</sup> According to Aker, evidence on the use of mobile phones for civic education and fraud prevention in

<sup>36</sup> See Swades Foundation, 2019, “About us” section at: <https://swadesfoundation.org/about-us/>.

<sup>37</sup> After Access applies surveys that “break out of the traditional connectivity narrative, and approach a nuanced understanding of how individuals navigate the barriers to meaningful access and use”. Among the topics raised are “online harassment, their preferences on social media sharing and their use of mobile phones and the Internet as enablers of economic activity”. See After Access (2018): <https://afteraccess.net/about-afteraccess>.

<sup>38</sup> Countries studied include Kenya, Mozambique, Ghana, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa and Tanzania. Kenya and South Africa have the largest percentages of rural young people owning a mobile phone (78.2 per cent and 77.3 per cent, respectively) and Rwanda has the lowest percentage (29.5 per cent).

<sup>39</sup> Countries studied include Bangladesh, Cambodia, India and Pakistan.

<sup>40</sup> Focused on indigenous populations and mobile technologies, Dyson et al. edited a companion that includes collaborations about how social media, videogames and cyberactivism, among others, are supporting indigenous populations’ struggles to overcome isolation while also “building an environment for the learning and sharing of knowledge, providing support for cultural and language revitalization, and offering the means for social and economic renewal” (Dyson et al., 2016, p. ii). Partial reviews include Rice et al. (2016) on the use of social media by indigenous young people in Australia.

electoral contexts is emerging, although a specific focus on youth (and therefore on rural youth) is still needed (Aker, 2018, p. 161). For the Commonwealth, discussing electoral politics in urban settings, “evidence suggests that the greater use of digital technologies is unlikely to improve significantly youth engagement in formal political structures and processes such as participation in election campaigns or voting. Instead, most of the engagement in the digital space takes place in the ‘low’ or informal spheres of politics” (Commonwealth, 2016, p. 75). The Commonwealth warns against so-called “clicktivism” by which “low-level, online engagement such as signing e-petitions, sharing posts or using hashtags may in fact stand in the way of committed participation. Proponents suggest that while the digital world has made it fairly easy to support a cause, the engagement is often superficial and short-lived, hardly helping the effort required to bring about tangible change” (Commonwealth, 2016, p. 76).

While ICTs neutralizes the information asymmetry that past generations suffered, young people still do not “have access to ICTs or to the skills to capitalise on them” and “social media may not be the reason why young people resort to protest in the first place, but research indicates that technology helps their agitation pick up steam quickly in certain circumstances, for instance, in countries that have large youth bulges” (Commonwealth, 2016, p. 76). Again, the need for skills formation and the absence of an enabling environment that is receptive to youth may explain why ICT has not yet become a first-choice technique to collect youth inputs into policymaking, although specific research on rural settings is needed.

## 7. Conclusions

In this paper we approached the vast literature and experiences around youth participation with the question of how rural youth can benefit from these mechanisms and experiences to improve their development opportunities and to get proactively involved in contributing to the development of their families, communities, regions and nations. Some promising practices in participation/engagement of rural young can be found in table 3. While some authors view youth participation as moving quickly to informal incidence through online activism, “self-organisation”, “networked governance” and a “do-it-ourselves approach” (Farrow, 2016, p. 10) through unconventional methods such as “volunteering, blogging, protests and consumer activism” (Commonwealth, 2016, p. 72), we believe that there is room to improve existing participation mechanisms, which today mostly avoid the transformation of rural settings and the new challenges associated with it. The creation of alliances between urban and rural actors (supported by structural rural transformation) and between older people and youth, and the technological change associated with better Internet access represent opportunities to bring decision-making processes closer to rural youth. While institutions such as IFAD and UNFPA do have strategies engaging rural youth in decision-making processes (at project level in the case of IFAD), current participatory mechanisms around the world – particularly at the national level – still lack of a strategy for hard-to-reach youth, particularly rural young people.

**Table 3.** A summary of promising practices in participation/engagement of rural young

<b>Informing</b>	<b>Consulting</b>	<b>Collaborating</b>	<b>Empowering</b>	<b>Other promising practices not directly linked to participation mechanisms</b>
<p>Sri Lanka's National Youth Services Council</p> <p>Philippines National Youth Commission</p>	<p>REAF</p> <p>Mercosur's rural youth meetings and workshops</p> <p>IFAD's Empowering Indigenous Youth and Their Communities to Defend and Promote Their Food Heritage</p> <p>MercyCorps's Trusting in Youth in Zimbabwe Project</p>	<p>UNFPA's youth advisory panels</p> <p>IFAD's Rural Youth Vocational Training, Employment and Entrepreneurship Support Project in Mali</p>	<p>Global Youth Innovation Network</p> <p>Restless Development initiative (Sierra Leone)</p> <p>Sri Lanka's Youth Parliament</p> <p>IFAD's CBNRMP</p>	<p>YouthPower</p> <p>MasterCard Foundation</p> <p>YPARD</p> <p>Swades Foundation</p>

The main conclusions of our review are:

- 1) **When thinking about youth inclusion, participation is decision-making.** Participation is a contentious concept among experts, practitioners, academics and policymakers at the theoretical level. Its definition ranges between political-transformational and technical-gradualist tones. Following the literature, we understand participation as engagement in meaningful decision-making processes; so far, the limited evidence linking participation with development outcomes in rural settings suggests this is the type of participation most closely associated with inclusion.
  
- 2) **Political receptiveness for implementing participation mechanisms is a first step towards success.** While technical approaches to participation may achieve some degree of inclusion for rural young people, it is clear that the creation of an enabling environment that provides meaningful participation for youth requires political support, which tends to be irregular in most contexts. Political support might translate into different measures, either general or youth-focused: the classic “good social and rural development policy and investment” as phrased by Sumberg et al. (2018, p. 40) or a focus on the demand side of youth policies (particularly job-related) as suggested by White (2018, p. 31). In either case, youth participation should be a key component of any overall strategy aimed at improvements in young people's livelihoods.
 

Political transitions after authoritarian rule and the end of armed conflicts have opened windows of opportunity for international agencies to expand the involvement of youth in newly inaugurated decision-making processes (as in the cases of Sri Lanka, Nepal and The Gambia). In other contexts, participation is formulated in such a way that it does not seriously channel youth people's concerns into the political system, as youth is engaged in “youth topics” or “between-youths forums” that do not have a substantial impact on their lives.
  
- 3) **For participation to be meaningful, it has to be built on a sustainable base.** Some participatory mechanisms rely on young people having pre-existing assets, and they build the participatory interventions upon them. For instance, work with rural organizations to integrate

young people into their structures makes us ask: what happens with young people in rural settings with no such organizations behind them? For them, participation could become ephemeral because it does not increase their assets (organization, social capital, agency) in any meaningful way. That is why it is very important to sustain participatory mechanisms linked to holistic approaches<sup>41</sup> working on material needs for this particularly isolated group, whereby participation should be not just a minor add-on but a core component of a big strategy. Young people in general have less power because they do not control their livelihoods, and this is particularly the case for young people in contexts with low social capital and limited mobilization capacities. For participation to be meaningful, general development strategies must take place at the same time, reducing marginalization and allowing more authentic participation to take place. In sum, the more marginalized the population, the more likely it is that any participation will be tokenism, since the costs – financial, time and cognitive/cultural – of bridging the gap and engaging in real dialogue are higher.

- 4) **The degree of structural and rural transformation affects different modes of participation.** Although rurality – generally speaking – presents challenges to promoting meaningful participation, the rural dynamics define different pathways towards meaningful participation. In isolated rural territories, informing and consulting mechanisms face challenges related to difficulties in the dissemination of information and rigid social norms. In peri-urban areas, the opposite holds true, although marginalization associated with urban settings (illicit economies, gang membership, etc.) becomes a problem. The speed of conversion to non-farm activities also plays a role in the time rural young people can allocate to such mechanisms. Therefore, there is no unique recipe for implementing participation programmes: based on the experiences reviewed here, participation proves to be important and useful but requires careful planning, with a solid diagnosis of the type of territory and context youth are embedded in, the level of rural transformation they are facing, the available infrastructure, the heterogeneity of the economy, etc. To a great extent, the success of participatory mechanisms will depend on finding the right recipe for each context.
- 5) **Lip-service, manipulation and tokenism are threats opposing meaningful participation by youth.** Promotion of participation mechanisms and broad strategies supporting youth inclusion in decision-making processes have not been a contentious issue for governments so far: on the contrary, many governments can show their records of formally adopting these mechanisms. However, lip-service on the issue, irrelevant participation and tokenism are threats opposing meaningful participation by youth, particularly those who are more marginalized. For many governments, participatory mechanisms are mainly a way to educate young people on “adult values”, rather than to inform policies based on youth inputs. In addition, young people need to have a voice on unconventional substantial topics, not only those stereotypically framed as related to youth.
- 6) **Almost all participation mechanisms under review lack a specific approach to rural youth.** While some of these mechanisms formally recognize the importance of tackling disadvantaged groups (among them rural youth), their structures lack means aimed at reaching them. Regarding participation, rurality is still an obstacle. There is room for institutions such as IFAD to fill the gap, for instance by raising the issue before national authorities in charge of these mechanisms.
- 7) **Achievers among youth must bring a wide set of values to participatory platforms, representative of those excluded.** In approaching youth, it is important to ensure that the most empowered young people in their communities (who are more likely to engage in

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<sup>41</sup> For instance, YouthPower’s Positive Youth Development Approach.

participatory mechanisms) bring to the table values, proposals and voices that favour better policies and programmes for broader youth social inclusion and development, particularly for the most excluded and voiceless youth. This could probably be done in part by exposing empowered youth to more marginalized areas and people. At the same time, investing in rural education and the promotion of connections with the non-rural and non-local world (virtual and hard infrastructure) should support in the long run the connection of the most excluded young people to participatory mechanisms. As stated by OECD in a recent report: “for agricultural policies to be more conducive to youth, youth representation needs to match the diversity of this group, as they may require different sets of interventions to facilitate their engagement in different segments of the agriculture value chain” (OECD, 2018, pp. 89-90).

- 8) **ICTs are changing the ways rural young people can receive information and how they express their views in decision-making processes, most clearly in the context of the rural transformation.** The massive adoption of mobile technologies in Latin America’s countryside in recent years (and also to a lesser extent in South Asia and Africa) might support future innovations in how to collect rural young people’s voices, inform them and build new participatory mechanisms. Rural youth is changing in the context of structural transformation, and efforts must be focused on accurately collecting their actual preferences on policies relevant to them, something that ICT’s expansion can bolster.
- 9) **Although participation is supportive of youth development and can better inform public policies regarding youth, it is not exempt from problems in its actual implementation, particularly unexpected consequences.** A good example of this comes from an evaluation of Innovation for Poverty Action in Peru. It found that accountability workshops (one of the participative techniques studied in this paper) for peasant communities in extractive zones of northern Peru “increased knowledge of participatory budgeting, but decreased citizen participation” (Innovations for Poverty Action, n.d.). Counterintuitively, “the information provided in workshops increased participants’ disillusionment with formal political institutions and led them to disengage from personally costly processes like participatory budgeting.”

Moreover, promotion of inclusive decision-making approaches, particularly for rural young people and women, is difficult to implement, even if linked to the provision of assets. For instance, evaluations of the GoBifo programme in Sierra Leone – a community driven development project that allocated grants of around US\$5,000 to “sponsor local public goods provision and small enterprise development” through the organization of new structures of collective action with representation of women and young people (Lynch et al., 2013, p. 31) – showed that community-driven development “is a reasonable approach to deliver small-scale local public goods in a way that is equitable, accountable and low cost”, but it did not “specifically empower women and youths (adults aged 18 to 35 years) in local development processes outside the specific GoBifo programme” (Casey et al., 2012, p. viii).

- 10) **There is an urgent need for quantitative data, randomized control trials and sound qualitative evaluations on this issue.** It is striking to note that almost no evaluations on participation or engagement programmes exist, which leads us to ask if experts see any value in such interventions. Therefore, for this review we could not find any standards for how to measure civic participation impact at all. Lack of political interest among development agencies and national/local governments in participation, and sensitive issues around not disputing power relations in rural communities, might explain this void. Specifically, there are no cost-benefit analyses of participatory interventions. We recommend promoting the collection of quantitative evidence about this issue in order to know if these interventions are cost-efficient. The definition of the desired outcome for participation programmes under



evaluation might include levels of interaction with government agencies, and development of hard and soft skills, among others.

**11) Participatory mechanisms are agency tools that youth can use to make rural transformation promises happen.** In the context of structural rural transformation, public participation of rural youth could help them to seize the opportunities produced by changes in the agriculture and non-farm sectors in rural areas. As the 2016 Rural Development Report pointed out, greater levels of inclusion associated with rural transformation “must be made to happen” (IFAD, 2016, p.12), and agency-related tools such as public participation are clearly in the front line of those possibilities. The need to “build and sustain political momentum” (IFAD, 2016, p.18) for positive change in agriculture-based rural economies and their prospects of diversification is directly linked to having authorities that are receptive to the implications of structural rural transformation. Therefore, supporting the participation of rural youth committed to this framework in decision-making platforms is a necessary first step.

Therefore, a practical recommendation is to support the construction and strengthening of meaningful public participation mechanisms among rural youth, particularly those who are familiar with the structural and rural transformation framework. Not all young people think alike. Depending on the kind of rural area they come from – isolated rural, semirural or peri-urban – they may have completely different diagnoses of what inclusive transformation means in rural areas. Therefore, a good start would be to support the public participation of rural youth in countries where rural transformation is happening. Young people could bring forward ideas related to this framework to policymakers on crucial issues such as “agricultural productivity, commercialization and diversification of production patterns and livelihoods within the agricultural sector and the rural non-farm sector” (IFAD, 2016, p. 17). These public participation mechanisms should preferably either collaborate with or empower young people, depending on the openness of the national contexts. However, as stated before, cost-effectiveness evaluations are required to implement this recommendation.

Summing up the main findings of this paper, participation mechanisms for rural youth can produce substantial results to enhance the development and social inclusion opportunities of the rural youth in three ways: first, collecting rural youth’s opinions on issues relevant to them through platforms that are sensitive to the challenges they face in participating (examples include REAF Mercosur’s workshops or UNFPA’s youth advisory panels); second, capitalizing rural youth and their organizations (examples include YouthPower’s approach to soft skills formation, the work of Mastercard Foundation on intergenerational partnerships through mentoring, and IFAD’s work already taking place in Senegal and Mali with youth organizations); and third, connecting youth with new institutions, organizations and territories (such as the work of YPARD and the Swades Foundation, linking rural youth and urban stakeholders in Peru and India, respectively).

However, together with the identified transformative potential of rural youth’s participation, a note of caution needs to be considered. The costs, time frame and requisite conditions to obtain the reviewed benefits need to be evaluated prior to adopting or recommending any of the participatory mechanisms reviewed here. More evaluations of processes, requisite conditions – institutional settings, infrastructure, etc. – impacts and costs are required to find the most effective participatory mechanisms for the more transformed rural settings as well as for the more traditional ones.

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## Appendix: experiences under review

### Global and regional initiatives

1. African Union Youth Division (<https://www.africa-youth.org/>)
2. ASEAN Youth Organization (<https://aseanyouth.net/>)
3. Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (<http://www.aspbae.org/>)
4. Caribbean Regional Youth Council (<https://caricom.org/about-caricom/who-we-are/institutions1/caribbean-regional-youth-council>)
5. CARICOM Youth Ambassadors (<https://caricom.org/caricom-youth-ambassadors>)
6. Commonwealth Youth Council (<http://commonwealthyouthcouncil.com/>)
7. Creating Opportunities for Rural Youth (CORY) Consortium
8. Global Youth Innovation Network (<http://www.gyin.org/>)
9. Melanesian Youth Parliament
10. Nuevas Trenzas project (Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Peru) (<https://iep.org.pe/estudios-y-proyectos/nuevas-trenzas-mujeres-rurales-jovenes-del-siglo-xxi/>)
11. Pacific Youth Council (<http://www.pacificyouthcouncil.org/>)
12. Pacific Youth Development Framework (PYDF) Partnership (<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/partnership/?p=7597>)
13. REAF Mercosul (<http://www.reakmercosul.org/>)
14. Restless Development initiative (<http://restlessdevelopment.org/>)
15. RIMISP rural dialogue groups ([https://rimisp.org/proyecto/jovenes\\_rurales/](https://rimisp.org/proyecto/jovenes_rurales/))
16. South Asian Youth Summit (<http://www.saarcyouth.org/>)
17. UNFPA youth advisory panels (country websites available)
18. Young Professionals for Rural Development (YPARD) (<https://ypard.net/>)
19. Mastercard Foundation Youth Forward Initiative

### IFAD projects

1. Agricultural Value Chains Support Project
2. Promoting Young People's Entrepreneurship
3. Rural Youth Vocational Training, Employment and Entrepreneurship Support Project
4. Community-Based Natural Resource Management Programme (CBNRMP)
5. Empowering Indigenous Youth and Their Communities to Defend and Promote Their Food Heritage



### **Latin America and the Caribbean**

1. Brazil National Youth Council (<http://juventude.gov.br/conjuve>)
2. Peru, Rikolto's coffee chain project (<https://latinoamerica.rikolto.org/es/project/cafe-y-cacao-en-junin-peru-proyecto-finalizado#tab-updates>)
3. Peru youth regional councils (COREJUs) (regional websites available)

### **Asia and Pacific islands**

1. Afghanistan Youth Parliament
2. Azerbaijan Youth Parliament
3. Union of Youth Federations of Cambodia (<http://www.uyfc.org/home/>) (civil society organization)
4. Cambodia Asian Youth Council (civil society organization)
5. Cambodia, Commune Youth Group Project ([https://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/index\\_66659.html](https://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/index_66659.html))
6. Fiji, National Youth Council (<https://www.facebook.com/NYCFiji/>)
7. India, Swades Foundation (<https://www.swadesfoundation.org>)
8. Jordan, Higher Youth Council ([https://jordan.gov.jo/wps/wcm/connect/gov/egov/government+ministries+\\_entities/higher+council+for+youth/higher+council+for+youth](https://jordan.gov.jo/wps/wcm/connect/gov/egov/government+ministries+_entities/higher+council+for+youth/higher+council+for+youth))
9. Jordan, Youth Participation in Local Governance (YPLG) project
10. Nepal Youth Council (<https://www.nationalyouthcouncil.org/>)
11. Nepal, United States Embassy Youth Council
12. South Asian Youth Summit (<http://www.saarcyouth.org>)
13. Pakistan Youth Parliament (<http://www.youthparliament.org.pk/>)
14. Pakistan, Punjab parliamentary youth caucus
15. Philippines National Youth Commission (<http://nyc.gov.ph/>)
16. Sri Lanka Youth Parliament ([http://www.nysc.lk/aboutParliament\\_e.php](http://www.nysc.lk/aboutParliament_e.php))
17. Sri Lanka National Youth Services Council ([http://www.nysc.lk/index\\_e.php](http://www.nysc.lk/index_e.php))
18. Timor Leste Youth Engagement to Promote Stability

### **Africa**

1. Botswana National Youth Council (<https://bnyco.weebly.com>)
2. The Gambia National Youth Council (<http://www.nyc.gm>)
3. The Gambia National Youth Parliament
4. Kenya National Youth Council
5. Rwanda Youth Council (<http://www.nyc.gov.rw/>)

6. Sierra Leone, GoBifo project ([http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTJSDF/Resources/EB-FINAL\\_Sierra\\_Leone\\_Jan5.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTJSDF/Resources/EB-FINAL_Sierra_Leone_Jan5.pdf))
7. Somalia, Somali Youth Leaders Initiative
8. South Africa, National Youth Development Agency (<http://www.nyda.gov.za/Pages/default.aspx>)
9. Zimbabwe, Trusting in Youth in Zimbabwe Project

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