

## Strategies for Retaining Youth in Rural Communities

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**Abstract:** The identify factors affecting on migration youths to urban centers is very important to rural program development. For develop strategies that attract and keep youth in rural communities, reasons youth migrate to urban centers must be closely examined and identified. The research method employed was correlative-descriptive. The population consisted rural youth in Shoushtar township of Khuzestan province in Iran. A random sample of rural youths (n=360) was selected. Data collected were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Appropriate statistical procedures for description (frequencies, percent, means, and standard deviations) were used. The main result of the study revealed that top reasons by youth for moving to urban centre including: employment, education, family-related and to get away. Also the top eight strategies for retaining youth to rural communities were: Improve career opportunities, Provide work experience opportunities , Improve opportunities for education after high school, Improve opportunities for social activities, Improve access to amenities, Promote the advantages of rural living, establishment of youth advisory committees establishment of youth priorities for local government, Promote youth involvement in community decision making. From a development perspective, the youth are the future for any country and the world. The potential of youth to transform rural communities needs to be recognized, especially in developing countries where the majority of citizens depend on agriculture as a source of livelihood. If rural development is to be sustainable, the rural youth need to be brought in the mainstream of the development process, no matter whether the development initiatives come from the public or private sector. Rural development in the long-term depends on how the youth are prepared to cope with the challenges they are likely to face as rural citizens.

[Ahmad Reza Ommani. Strategies for Retaining Youth in Rural Communities. Journal of American Science 2011; 7(1):980-983]. (ISSN: 1545-1003). <http://www.americanscience.org>.

**Keywords:** Youth, Rural development, Employment, Migration

### 1. Introduction

There is a widespread belief that rural youths have vital role to agricultural and rural development (Malatest, 2002; Odhiambo, 2001; Gameren and Hinojosa, nd).The identify factors affecting on migration youths to urban centers is very important to rural program development. For develop strategies that attract and keep youth in rural communities, reasons youth migrate to urban centers must be closely examined and identified. According to survey results, rural youth who currently live or have lived in urban communities relocated to large centers to pursue post-secondary education, find employment, or accompany family (Malatest, 2002). According to Fajans et al (nd), rural youth have less opportunities in period of after formal education programming and activities than their urban counterparts. It is also acknowledged that youth get into trouble more often if they have nowhere to go and no meaningful activities to keep them occupied in after school hours. Although youth migration has been a popular subject in recent years, little research has focused on the migration between rural and urban areas. One of the main factors affecting young people's success to employment in agricultural

practices was their connection with local informal networks. Informal networks provided young people with information about forthcoming employment opportunities or personal recommendations for jobs. (Cartmel and Furlong, 2000). Although youth migration has been a popular subject in recent years, little research has focused on the migration between rural and urban areas. According Ommani and Chizari (2006) Extension educators can extend the opportunities in youth development issues. They have the ability to help youth develop in different ways. In addition, efforts should be made to help youth develop the capacity to voice their needs within the cultural, social, and political framework. FAO (1999) explained" currently, 472 million young people are living in rural communities in developing countries. Unfortunately, many rural young people are choosing instead to migrate to the city in order to make a better life for themselves or send money home to help their families – an exodus that constitutes a severe threat to global food security"(p. 17).

Agriculture is a vital sector of the economy of Iran. Currently, about one-fourth of the nation's Gross National Product, one-third of the work force, more than four-fifths of the nation's food needs, one-

third of non-oil exports, and nine-tenths of industry is dependent on agriculture (Ommani, 2006). Rural youth of Iran have vital role to agriculture sector, especially in livestock husbandry. Among the activities of the agriculture sector, livestock husbandry has an important and special role. It not only provides the protein needs of the people, but eighty-five percent of the work force in the agriculture sector is involved, full or part-time, in livestock production. A greater understanding of this sector is needed as Iran addresses its goal of self-sufficiency in the production of food and fiber products (Chizari, Bahmani, & Lindner, 2001; Chizari, Lindner, & Lashkarara, 2001; Ommani, 2006). In this paper, we determined the strategies for retaining youth to rural communities.

#### Objectives

The specific objectives of this study were to:

1) Describe rural youths in Shoushtar township of Khuzestan province by demographic characteristics.

2) Describe reasons for moving to urban centers cited by rural youth.

3) Identify strategies for retaining youth to rural communities.

## 2. Material and Methods

The research design was a descriptive method. The population consisted of 360 rural youths of Shoushtar Township, Khuzestan Province of Iran (Krejcie and Morgan, 1970). From a review of the literature, the researchers developed an instrument to collect data (Samardick, 2000; Malatest, 2002; Cartmel & Furlong, 2000; Odhiambo, 2001; Valentine et al, 2005). Face and content validity of the questionnaire was established using a panel of experts consisting of faculty in the Department of Agricultural at Islamic Azad University- Shoushtar Branch, Iran. A pilot test was conducted with 15 youths. Questionnaire reliability was estimated by calculating Cronbach's alpha. Reliability for the overall instrument was .83. Data were collected through a structured interview and a questionnaire with youths at their rural. The response rate was 97%. According to Lindner, Murphy, and Briers (2001), nonresponse error is not a threat to external validity of a study when an 85% response rate is achieved. Data collected were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Appropriate statistical procedures for description (frequencies, percent, means, and standard deviations) were used.

## 3. Results

The following section present finding by objective:

#### Objective 1

The first objective was to describe rural youths in Shoushtar township of Khuzestan province by demographic characteristics. All respondent were male. Approximately 45% of respondents between 18 to 21 year. Rural youths were asked to report their highest level of education: 34% of youths had an elementary education; 16% were illiterate; 35% had high school diploma; 15% had post high school education.

#### Objective 2

The second objective was assessing top reasons for moving to urban centre. According to survey results, top reasons by youth idea that living in rural including: employment, education, family-related and to get away (Chart 1).

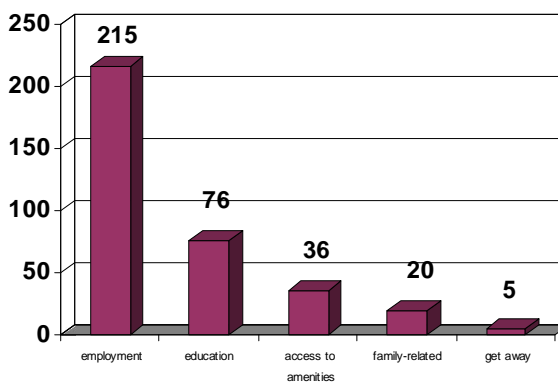


Chart 1. Top reasons for moving to urban centers.

#### Objective 3

The third objective was to identify strategies for retaining youth to rural communities. The top eight strategies for retaining youth to rural communities were (Table 1): Improve career opportunities, Provide work experience opportunities, Improve opportunities for education after high school, Improve opportunities for social activities, Improve access to amenities, Promote the advantages of rural living, establishment of youth advisory committees establishment of youth priorities for local government, Promote youth involvement in community decision making.

According to the correlation analysis, there was a significant relationship between crop yield, income, land ownership, and mechanization with level of perception of rural youth to rural living were significantly positive.

Table 1. Strategies for retaining youth to rural communities.

Reason	Mean	SD	Rank
Improve career opportunities	4.25*	.78	1
Provide work experience opportunities	3.95	.75	2
Improve opportunities for education after high school	3.68	.89	3
Improve opportunities for social activities	3.46	.85	4
Improve access to amenities	3.24	1.03	5
Promote the advantages of rural living	3.13	1.13	6
establishment of youth advisory committees	2.90	1.23	7
establishment of youth priorities for local government	2.71	1.13	8
Promote youth involvement in community decision making	2.73	1.29	9

\*1)Not important; 2)Little important; 3) Somewhat important; 4)Very important; 5) Extremely important

Table2. Correlation between some characteristics with perception of rural youth to rural living

Characteristics	r	p
Level of education	.015	0.652
Land ownership	0.606	0.000***
Income	0.754	0.000***
Social participation	0.214	0.003**
Social status	0.013	0.618
Mechanization level	0.554	0.000***
Use of communication channel	0.115	0.050*
Crop yield	0.587	0.000***

Note. \*: p<0.05; \*\*: p<0.01; \*\*\*: p<0.001

Table4. Liner regression for predict changes in perception of rural youth to rural living

Variable	B	SE B	Beta	T	Tsig
Income (x <sub>1</sub> )	0.325	0.635	0.875	3.351	0.004
Social participation (x <sub>2</sub> )	0.553	0.444	0.234	4.442	0.000
Mechanization level (x <sub>3</sub> )	0.769	0.236	0.344	5.436	0.000
Perception to agricultural practices (x <sub>4</sub> )	0.986	0.275	0.556	5.339	0.000
Crop yield (x <sub>5</sub> )	0.556	0.625	0.245	4.356	0.000
Signif F =0.000			F= 81.123		
R <sup>2</sup> =0.760			R= 0.871		

In continue used liner regression for predict changes in perception of rural youth to rural living. Income, Social participation, Mechanization level, Perception of rural youths' awareness with respect to agricultural practices and Crop yield may well explain for 76% changes (R<sup>2</sup>=.76) in perception of rural youth to rural living.. This relationship is described in the following formula:

$$Y=4.563+0.325 x_1+0.553 x_2+0.769 x_3+0.986 x_4+0.556 x_5$$

#### 4. Recommendations and Implications

From a development perspective, the youth are the future for any country and the world. The potential of youth to transform rural communities needs to be recognized, especially in developing

countries where the majority of citizens depend on agriculture as a source of livelihood. If rural development is to be sustainable, the rural youth need to be brought in the mainstream of the development process, no matter whether the development initiatives come from the public or private sector. Rural development in the long-term depends on how the youth are prepared to cope with the challenges they are likely to face as rural citizens.

The research confirmed that while much of this outflow could be attributed to employment, educational and social factors, there are a number of activities or actions that could be implemented to help redress the factors that contribute to rural youth migration. The research also confirms that for many rural youth, the relocation to a larger urban centre is both an economic and social priority. However, many of these same youth would return to a rural or small

town community if such communities could be made more attractive to youth.

Extension educators can extend the opportunities in youth development issues. They have the ability to help youth develop in different ways. In addition, efforts should be made to help youth develop the capacity to voice their needs within the cultural, social, and political framework. We must :

- Provide a conditions for rural youth to connect with peers across the state and share information to rural youth.

- Effort to communicating and exchanging information, including establishing the teamwork in youth club.

- Identify that rural youth have limited access to post-secondary education opportunities; it is important that education and training institutions provide sufficient opportunities for rural youth to acquire the skills and knowledge, particularly those that could be valuable to the local community.

The results also showed that top four strategies that could be implemented by organizations to support the economic and social conditions conducive to increasing the desire of rural youth to remain in and/or return to rural communities were: 1) Improve career opportunities, 2) Provide work experience opportunities, 3) Improve opportunities for education after high school, and 4) Improve opportunities for social activities.

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12/21/2010