

NEW YORK, US, September 21 (Infosplusgabon) - Farming and rural non-farm-based activities still have untapped potential to generate employment opportunities for Africa's rising youth population, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) has stressed at a high level forum - Harnessing Skills for Rural Transformation and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals - held at the margins of the United Nations General Assembly.

Africa has the youngest population and the fastest growing population in the world, predicted to double by 2050. This has a major impact on the employment market.

Although 10 to 12 million young people join the labour force in Africa each year, only around three million jobs are created annually, FAO said.

In this context, the agricultural sector as well as rural non-farm activities in tourism, agro-industries, food storage and transportation have high potential to create more and better jobs, and build stronger rural communities.

"Investing in rural transformation and reaching a world free of hunger and malnutrition go hand in hand. Promoting better education, skills development and decent employment is vital for this transformation in Africa," said FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva, who is part of a

group of world leaders at the high level forum on Wednesday, sharing experiences and best practice in creating and expanding employment and economic opportunities for Africa's youth.

AN FAO statement said the UN food agency carries out 32 youth employment projects in 20 African countries. It supports countries and the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) to enhance their youth policies, strategies and plans, and social protection measures.

It trains vulnerable rural youth not only in agricultural techniques but also provides them with business and life skills so that they can become more productive and active members of their communities.

"But more coordinated and systematic efforts are still needed to increase impact and expand regional and country-level action in Africa," said Graziano da Silva.

"Adopting a territorial approach that focuses on strengthening the physical, economic, social and political links between small urban centers and their surrounding rural areas is equally vital. Let's not forget that the small and medium-sized cities are the places where farmers buy seeds, send their children to school, and turn to medical care," added Graziano da Silva.

Youth, in turn, can play a significant role in advancing their countries' progress towards reaching the Sustainable Development Goals, and can act as innovators and networkers between rural and urban areas.

FAO recently launched a Special Programme to promote youth employment through enabling agriculture and agri-business jobs in Africa.

It said the programme is another example of FAO's long-lasting collaboration with the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) - an economic development program of the African Union - and of FAO's efforts to strengthen partnerships.

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