Promotion de la Famille Paysanne

Youth Economic Empowerment Program

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is a vast, under-developed Central African country of over 78M people, plagued with political instability, poor health, extreme poverty, gender inequity, and human rights violations. As in many countries, children and adolescents in rural villages often participate in their family's animal husbandry and agricultural activities, while juggling school studies and other interests. As young people in poor communities, they have very limited opportunities to fund their own personal needs and wants, or to contribute to their family's financial situation.

Engaging Youth in Poverty Alleviation

PFP is a Congolese-led livestock asset transfer program serving poor rural households in the South Kivu province in Eastern DRC. As part of the broader strategy to promote income generating activities with adults (e.g., livestock/animal rearing), the program also has a youth-focused initiative that engages motivated adolescents of participating PFP families in raising animals too.
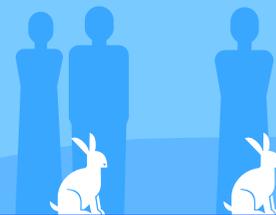
How the PFP Youth Empowerment Program Works

Interested boys and girls (10-15 years old) in PFP families receive a female rabbit as a loan and asset for them to raise with permission of parents.

Participants are mentored in building a rabbit cage with locally-sourced materials, composting and nurture the young rabbit to maturity.

When the rabbit provides offspring, youth reimburse two female rabbits to PFP to pay it forward and provide loans to other youth in the same or neighboring village.

Economic Empowerment

Adolescents are motivated to participate with the hope of selling a rabbit to help pay school fees, purchase a school uniform, and fund supplies for themselves and siblings. They also invest in other businesses, like selling pens/notebooks to students at their schools, or to save up for personal items. This provides both an opportunity to contribute to the wellbeing of their family, but also instills a sense of pride and accomplishment for being able to earn money and make purchases themselves.

Why Rabbits?

- Rabbits tend to be relatively easy for youth to raise, while participating in school, family chores, and other community activities

- Rabbits require small amounts of food that is widely available in villages and they reproduce frequently, multiplying their investment

- There are no cultural taboos, age, or gender-based responsibilities for raising/selling rabbits, and they can provide a good source of protein promoting food security for the youth and their family

Research Study to Evaluate Program Effectiveness

Johns Hopkins University has worked closely with PFP staff to complete a comparative effectiveness trial with:

542 young adolescents

10-15 years old

in **10** different villages

Compared to the control group (no rabbit in PFP family), adolescents in the program had:

- **Improvement in food security** *- most improvement for younger, 10-11 years of age and girls*

- **Improvement in prosocial behavior** *(e.g. listens to others and elders, plays together with others, helps others)*

- **Improvement in economic capacity** *(e.g. learning how to better earn money or acquire new income generating assets for the family)*

- **Missed fewer days of school in the past month**
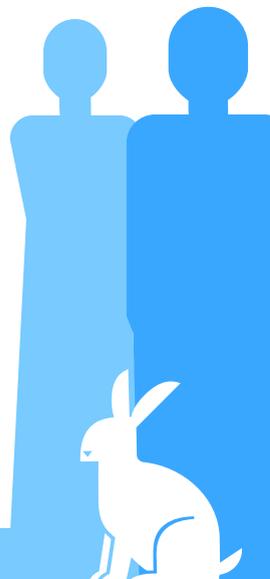
Positive Impact

When asked about their experience in the program, one youth explained "It helps me with a lot of things, I am not sleeping without eating, sending me back to school, I have clothes, and not wandering in the street… like going in the street because I don't have anything to do. Like going wandering somewhere we don't even know."

These findings reinforce the value of engaging youth in community-led sustainable development initiatives. They learn important skills as young adolescents and develop capacities that will positively contribute to sustained health, economic and social impact for themselves, families and communities over time.

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