

Lack of infrastructure, jobs drives rural youth to cities, says UN rural poverty agency head

3 April 2017 – Investing in rural youth is essential to stem the migration of young people looking for work in cities and to keeping a global food supply, the new head of the United Nations agency charged with eradicating rural poverty today said.

In one of his [first interviews](#) since taking on the leadership of the UN's International Fund for Agricultural Development ([IFAD](#)), Gilbert Hougbo said he wants people to see life in rural areas as a choice and not a necessity.

“Food security and nutrition are essential, but we have to go beyond that and really aim at the fight against poverty and look at agriculture as a decent income-generating activity,” noted Mr. Hougbo, who was previously the Deputy Director-General of the International Labour Organization ([ILO](#)).

Without adequate investment in the world's most vulnerable communities, he continued, there will be increased instability and conflict and people will find it harder to bounce back from shocks, giving them more reasons to flee rural areas.

“We need to work on those hardships so that young people can be happy in a rural setting, instead of looking to go to the capital or move outside their country,” he said.

Mr. Hougbo, whose senior positions include serving as Prime Minister of Togo, understands first-hand the challenges of living in the countryside, according to IFAD. Mr. Hougbo grew up in rural Togo, and pledged to work through IFAD to aid young people living in rural poverty.

“When I was a youngster of eight years old, I had to walk four kilometres every morning to go and get water for the house, and a few years later I had to walk 20 kilometres every day to get to high school,” he said. “It is unacceptable that kids today have to go through the same thing 40 to 50 years later.”

Mr. Hougbo said his priority is to ensure that IFAD continues to have the resources to invest in rural areas so that they become “places of prosperity and hope, where people can build decent lives and not be compelled to migrate.”