International Positive Youth Development Initiative
Concept Paper

Abstract
This paper outlines an international youth development initiative for countries interested in creating programs modeled after, but distinct from, the 4-H Youth Development Programs in the United States. The 4-H model, which is implemented through USDA’s National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), the U.S. Cooperative Extension System and land-grant universities nationwide, can serve as an example of how other countries can promote positive youth development. For example, by accessing 4-H experts from U.S. land-grant universities, USDA can assist in providing relevant insight to colleagues who are building or strengthening youth engagement and employment programs, particularly within countries where the agricultural sector is so important. By building youth’s leadership, citizenship, and entrepreneurship skills, and by designing lessons in agriculture, science, health and nutrition to meet their needs and interests, a 4-H-type program offers young people a chance to develop into caring, intelligent, productive adults. By involving young people, positive youth development programs also reach parents and other caring adults, and in so doing, refreshes agricultural systems with innovations.

Introduction to 4-H
For more than 100 years, the USDA 4-H Youth Development Program 4-H has fostered the mission mandates of healthy living, citizenship, and science among young people. The idea of 4-H, which stands for Head, Heart, Hands, and Health, started as a way to connect public school education with country life. At the turn of the 20th century, USDA and land-grant university researchers found that, while adults in farm communities did not readily accept new agricultural discoveries, young people would experiment with new ideas and share their experiences and successes with adults. As a result, 4-H became a highly successful route for introducing new agricultural principles and technologies to adults. These young people are involved in intentional learning opportunities focused on applied scientific discovery in fields such as agricultural and food science, environmental and natural resources, applied technology such as GPS/GIS, and robotics. They also learn about citizenship, leadership, communication, and community service.

4-H emphasizes a practical, “hands-on” application of knowledge to develop skills and acquire a sense of responsibility, initiative and self-worth. This reflects the proven research that youth learn best when they are actively involved in relevant, real-world situations. This inquiry-based, scientific approach to experiential learning combines youth-driven, non-formal learning opportunities in which the learners help determine the topics of study, the means of learning and the outcome. In addition to the skills and knowledge gained from a particular area of study, participants in 4-H develop leadership qualities, interpersonal skills, decision-making ability, and a heightened awareness of their role as citizens engaged in their community.
USDA and 4-H Around the World: Historic and Current Examples

Basic concepts of 4-H have taken hold in countries around the world. For example, exchanges have been conducted between the United States and more than 80 countries in Western and Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa, and Central America. A recent scan indicates that several universities focus on professional staff development where land-grant institutions send faculty abroad to deliver programs and to train counterparts on how to conduct positive youth development programs, particularly in the area of youth-adult partnerships and/or curriculum development. Study tours (1-2 weeks), organized to “internationalize” 4-H-type programs, and are also popular.

Land-grant colleagues say that they develop several benefits from sponsoring such international activities, including greater global awareness, enhanced sensitivity to cultural diversity, improved ability to form relationships, and the opportunity to create understanding where it had not previously existed. Other benefits include increased civic engagement of youth and adults who develop an understanding of cultural global issues, and as a result, adapt to other cultures. Also, several land-grant cooperative extension youth professionals are working day to day with culturally diverse communities within the U.S., and by engaging internationally they develop cross-cultural skills that are applicable to their jobs at home.

A Future Initiative: “The International Positive Youth Development Initiative”

Throughout the United States, the 4-H Youth Development Program has a track record of building leadership, citizenship, and entrepreneurship skills. A similar kind of program – an International Positive Youth Development initiative - could be adopted to serve youth training needs in the agricultural sector in developing countries. Many of these countries have agricultural-based economies and their farm sectors are lagging, with high levels of unemployment among adults and youth. In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, about half of the population is less than eighteen years old and over 60% of the population lives in rural areas with agriculture as the primary activity. Just as in the early history of United States, social and economic advances in many countries around the world depend on growing a healthy agricultural sector which depends, in turn, on youth employment and engagement. Indeed, a country’s food security and even stability usually depends on whether or not its youth are given a chance to prosper.

4-H is authorized by Congress as a domestic program and therefore the 4-H Name and Emblem cannot be authorized for use overseas. Instead, and as with many other international activities, USDA facilitates access to the services of American positive youth development cooperative extension land-grant experts. These colleagues provide advice and insight to developing countries that have identified youth employment and agricultural development as priorities. Using such advice, it would be up to each country to design a positive youth program that reflects its own cultural, political and socio-economic context. Importantly, through flow back benefits, lessons learned and shared best practices, such work could strengthen comparable existing U.S.-based youth development programs. As partner countries express an interest in positive youth development programs, NIFA would respond by leading an effort to involve cooperative extension land-grant universities, USDA’s Foreign Agricultural Service and other government stakeholders who could provide technical assistance for
country-led positive youth development program. USDA would also tap into existing or planned U.S. facilitated activities that are focused on food security, capacity development, childhood nutrition and other relevant areas.

The Approach: Building Competencies, Capacities and Connections
This envisioned international initiative would use USDA and land-grant programs, tools, knowledge, and partnerships to foster positive youth development country-based programs. The international initiative would be tailored to local needs, use available resources, build upon original support, respect cultural values and internal power structures, and leverage existing positive youth development efforts. Below are some of the approaches that could be used:

- Competency: Cooperative Extension land-grant universities and colleges (LGUs) would provide competency-building training by helping to design youth-focused curricula in the agricultural sciences. Such curricula would outline relevant and culturally appropriate intentional learning opportunities and content grounded in research-based methods for youth and adult team teaching. LGU experts would draw upon experiences that span the agricultural value chain, and draw on entrepreneurial skill sets. A country’s positive youth development program would also be encouraged to partner with its own universities, and such partnerships would foster new or continued relationship building between those universities and America’s LGUs.

- Capacity: LGUs would foster capacity development among youth at home and abroad through courses, field work and internship opportunities. For example, the international initiative would tap collegiate-aged U.S. youth to serve as peer mentors and advisors in foreign communities. These young Americans would help local community leaders offer relevant and culturally appropriate programs. Creating teams of trained U.S. youth enrolled in land-grant institutions would build a pipeline between the United States and other countries at the local community level.

- Connection: LGUs’ positive youth development programmatic leadership and extension directors would build connections to counterparts in other countries. Through study tours, U.S. campus and field faculty would be able to share information and experiences with host-country colleagues as they jointly develop and administer youth development programs. Additionally, 4-H clubs could be linked to similar groups or clubs in host countries, either through formal or non-formal opportunities. Such relationships would close cultural gaps as youth from different countries share information about their interests in citizenship and government, customs and values, food and agriculture, sports, literature and music, science and technology, clothing, and sports and entertainment.

- Leveraging Other Federal Agencies: The USDA would join with other federal agencies such as Peace Corps, USAID and the Department of State for leverage. For example, links between Peace Corps, USDA and the cooperative extension land-grant community might be useful in linking and enhancing existing youth-centered scholarly programs.
Program Benefits
The international initiative outlined in this paper provides the following benefits:

Host country
- Support food security, economic growth, stability and educational objectives; and
- Build a trained workforce and create productive employment.

Youth
- Build life skills through agricultural sciences that benefit youth in their careers, improve their economic well being, and are helpful in supporting their families and communities;
- Prepare youth for work in the agricultural value chain, extension service programs, and additional training and education;
- Enhance and complement other instruction in language and literacy, math, science, and government through experiential learning; and,
- Provide leadership development opportunities that promote interpersonal relations and communication skills, problem solving, teamwork, and character development.

United States
- Provide cross-cultural and trans-national insights and awareness that make U.S. youth more globally competent and engaged;
- Complement US food security programs and objectives for developing countries;
- Increase ability of 4-H leaders to work effectively in increasingly diverse U.S. communities; and,
- Build public interest in 4-H at home by engaging schools and universities, foundations, and the corporate sector.

This concept paper provides an expanded overview for an international positive youth development initiative that puts USDA and its network of cooperative extension land-grant universities at the forefront of positive youth development work throughout the world.

Affiliated Organization Agreements
The creation of Affiliate Organization Agreements (AOA) provides clear expectations to the relationship and intended outcomes being built between the United States and another country in the field of positive youth development. These agreements will only be considered with those countries that meet and/or are making significant effort towards implementing the principles listed below. USDA’s Office of General Counsel has reviewed the AOA template and found it to be “legally sufficient for the anticipated use.”

Affiliate organizations must meet the following positive youth development program criteria:
- Programming is developmentally appropriate;
- Programming has scope and sequence;
- Programming methodology is based in an experiential learning context;
- Programming environment provides inclusive and diverse learning experiences;
- Programming is effective in addressing multiple learning styles;
- Programming engages youth and adults learning and working together; and
- Programming enhances the essential elements of youth development.