



Value and reward systems: enticing Young Professionals (YP) to agriculture!

Outcomes of YPARD e-discussions - GCARD2 Youth discussions

RATIONALE

In developing countries, 75 percent of poor people live in rural areas and most of them depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. Agriculture thus remains vital for sustainable development, poverty reduction and food security¹. At the same time, among the young generation, interest in agriculture in general and in pursuing careers in agricultural sciences is low. Along with recently-renewed international attention for agriculture as a driver of economic development in countries in the south, new attention is thus also required for engaging young people in the future of agriculture².

Furthermore, agriculture as a career choice is burdened with misperceptions and a lack of information and awareness. The attitude that prevails at the moment is one that perceives agriculture as not offering opportunities for a successful livelihood. A national study in Canada has shown that it is difficult to recruit and retain skilled staff in the agricultural sector and that it has a negative image. This is mostly due to uncompetitive wages, the physical aspects associated with work in the sector and the lack of awareness of career options within agricultural sector³.

Many youth take up formal education with the mindset that after graduating from school, they will end up with a big job in big offices. It is difficult for young people in tertiary institutions to think about getting back to the village to farm as they are expected to have a high-paying job after graduating. Hence, agriculture is seen as offering opportunities of the 'last resort', when all other attempts including education have failed.

With high youth unemployment, youth are migrate from the rural to the urban areas in large numbers. This has been associated with problems such as dwindling stock of future farmers with appropriate experience and skills in agriculture.

There is need to change such mindsets, make agriculture attractive and rewarding for youth. Governments need to strongly invest in agriculture. In instances where agriculture has largely been subsistence, there is need to mechanised the system and provide incentives to farmers and all the necessary support involved along the agricultural value chains.

Against this background, some important questions that need to be addressed in the GCARD 2 (Global Conference on Agricultural Research for Development) youth e-discussions include:

- What are the opportunities for YPs in the field of agriculture?
- How can agriculture be promoted, marketed and packaged as a viable career among YPs?

¹ World Bank. 2008. Agriculture for Development. World development report 2008. The World Bank, Washington, DC.

² Kruijssen, F., 2009. Youth engagement in agricultural research. A focus on Sub-Sahara Africa. Wageningen International. Wageningen University and Research Centre, Wageningen, The Netherlands. 72 pp.

³ George Morris Centre, 2005. Environmental scan & literature search of agricultural human resource issues, George Morris Centre, Ontario.

- What type of incentive and reward system (other than one that is based on publication) should be put in place to encourage more young people to go into ARD (agricultural research for development)?

Hopefully, response to these questions will encourage more YPs to choose agriculture as a career. The online discussion has been summarized to highlight the key issues, identified problems, shared personal experiences and suggestions and recommendations from YPs in ARD.

KEY ISSUES AND PROBLEMS IDENTIFIED/HIGHLIGHTED

Participants of the YPARD e-discussion shared their experiences and how they got into agriculture/agricultural research and development. Most of them did not have the objective to work in agriculture and ARD from the beginning of their career, as they held prejudices against the agriculture sector. Some of the participants got into the field through junior programs or work based placements while others had very supportive mentors which encouraged them to go on in the agricultural sector or got motivated by the success stories of professionals already working in the field.

Prejudices and negative perceptions of agriculture make many young people reluctant to pursue a career in the sector. Participants of the electronic discussion cited **several ways of addressing this**, including the following:

- improving agricultural education curriculum;
- establishing mentoring systems;
- offering internships and hands-on experiences in agricultural professions; organizing exhibitions and fairs to introduce young people to agriculture;
- showcasing success stories of young agricultural entrepreneurs;
- exploring ways to promote the self-esteem of agriculture graduates, particularly in countries where it is negatively perceived.

Young people are interested in getting a high salary as fast as possible and don't see agriculture as a well paid field, which often turns them away from agriculture. Many are interested in ICT and modern technology and don't want jobs which require laborious manual work, such as farming and its related jobs might require.

Interestingly, very few people from the North participated in the discussion, but for the ones who did, their comments showed that in their countries agriculture has a slightly better image for young people than in the South. This may be due to a better perception of agriculture by society, higher governmental investment in the sector and a more developed infrastructure allowing people employed in the field to use modern technology. In some northern countries agriculture is seen as the traditional sector, which nowadays has additional tasks to merely producing food or other agricultural goods. Services like environmental protection, landscape management and the provision of recreational value to the population as well as tourism are now expected from the agricultural sector. These services require skilled people and an effective infrastructure.

Many **initiatives** are already in place trying to make agriculture more attractive to young people and showing them the benefit of working in this field, one of which is AWARD (African Women in Agricultural Research and Development). The CAADP (Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme) contains

elements targeting young people, ARDYIS (Agriculture, Rural Development and Youth in the Information Society) organizes competitions to attract young people, and the Agriculture Youth Club (AYC) supports young people in the agricultural business to mention only a few initiatives taking place mainly in Africa. Such programmes should be strengthened and scaled-up.

It was also discussed that **a reward system should be put in place to encourage young people to start a career in the agricultural sector**. Several possible kinds of rewards were discussed, among them, i) offering more internships and scholarships, ii) providing funding for starting up a business, iii) land allocation schemes, and iv) providing financial rewards for personal accomplishments.

Overall, e-discussants agree of the need to highlight the importance and the opportunities that can be provided to young people. To do this, all actors must do their part. Participants in the discussion singled out **governments and policy makers as the most important actors** who should take lead in promoting agriculture and youth involvement. Appropriate policies need to be designed, implemented, monitored and also evaluated.

These **policies should address a wide range of issues** in the sector such as, but not limited to, the following:

1. Developing infrastructure needed in agriculture;
2. Increasing support in research and extension;
3. Facilitating access to capital and reduced risks for young agro-entrepreneurs;
4. Putting up youth-friendly banking and insurance schemes (loans are difficult to obtain as banks mostly require a collateral, which is often difficult to obtain by a YP planning to start up an agri-business);
5. Ensuring youth involvement in policy decisions that impact them;
6. Implementing “quota system” for hiring young professionals in ARD institutions;
7. Vacation jobs, work-based placements and internships will deepen the knowledge and fill the purse.
8. Designing strong and effective mentoring program for YPs in ARD;
9. Providing incentives through the promotion of Agriculture Youth Clubs activities;
10. Integrating ICT and state of the art technology in ARD;
11. Promoting youth involvement of youths in the agricultural value chain (input suppliers, support institutions, processors, wholesalers, service providers, etc)

INTERESTING PERSONAL EXPERIENCES SHARED

“I have met many young people who are involved in Agriculture in rural areas and who are doing great in terms of their commitment and engagement in agriculture - This is because also agriculture becomes the only major source of activity that the young people can get involved in alongside other income generating activities that they may think of or may be involved in.” **Moses Owiny, Uganda**

“When I was admitted into the university in the year 1994, I had the option of choosing a course in the Faculty of Sciences (Biology, Botany, Chemistry, Mathematics, Microbiology and Geology), Science Education or Agriculture. I opted for agriculture. The reason I thought then was because graduate unemployment was already on the rise and I wanted to study something I could practice on my own and earn a living even if there would be no government or company job”. **Julius N.Ingweye, Nigeria**

"For me there is clearly the idea behind of: which field offers job potentials in the future? And here agriculture is a top field: people will always have to eat and since the world's population is growing, we will need more innovative solutions on how to feed the world, distribute the commodities, reach also the people living in marginal areas and also apart from food production, how do we use our resources in a sustainable way. Therefore agronomists will be sought after in the future." **Johanna M. Gysin, Switzerland**

"The first incentives I got which really attracted me to Agriculture and ARD were the 2 work-based placements (which was part of the university programme) I had been part of during my 1st and 2nd year. Each one was for a duration of 2 months and I got a good exposure on Agricultural Extension (where I was assisting extension officers and was part of extension programmes in both crop and livestock sector) and Agricultural Chemistry (where I was doing analysis on soil, feed, fodder and water for nutrient determination). These experiences were very enriching in the sense that I got an over-view how it is like to work in the Agricultural sector and what is the importance of Agricultural Research and Extension in the value-chain." **Nawsheen Hosenally, Mauritius**

*"Years ago, I applied for the Junior Professional Officer (JPO) programme in my country (Italy), the programme that provides YPs to pursue a career in developing with hands-on experience in multi-lateral technical co-operation (<http://www.jposc.org>). The programme is funded by most of the western European countries, Australia, Japan, Rep of Korea (and in the past also by other countries), to sponsor YPs from their own countries. The JPO positions are with the various UN agencies, but exceptionally there are a very few positions with CGIAR centres (Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research). I was one of the exceptions, so that's how I ended up to work for 4 years in ARD. This was a great opportunity for me, and the most interesting job I have ever had, who allowed me to enter this interesting field of work. The JPO experience helped me to find my current job in a university (international agriculture)." **Alessandra Giuliani, Italy***

"Personally, the idea clicked of ARD when I was in secondary school where students from Bunda College of Agriculture came for an awareness campaign at our secondary school. However, I got the idea as 'just' one of the career options and never gave a serious consideration. In my application for the university, I selected agriculture as my 3rd and last option. I aimed for information systems and computer studies. I was then selected into an agricultural program and never had the passion for it. As I was pursuing my bachelors' degree I got the full view of agriculture as a career, the possibilities and saw how other people are progressing very well. After my BSc studies I applied for a fellowship program called "African Women in Agricultural research and Development (AWARD)" which strengthened my passion for ARD." **Msekiwa Matsimbe, Malawi**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Discussions were launched the 3rd September and closed the 14th September 2012.

During these 11 days there were 36 posts on the site coming from 12 participants for the discussion on agricultural curricula change.

Alessandra Giuliana and Oliver Oliveros were the facilitator of this topic discussion.

The report was prepared by Apeh Omede.

We thank the participants to these e-discussions:

• <i>Oliver Oliveros, Philippines/France</i>	• <i>Moses Owiny, Uganda</i>
• <i>Luke K. Korir, Kenya</i>	• <i>Mohammed Yaro, Ghana</i>
• <i>Martín L. Uranga, Uruguay</i>	• <i>Alessandra Giuliani, Italy/Switzerland</i>
• <i>Msekiwa Matsimbe, Malawi</i>	• <i>Johanna M. Gysin, Switzerland</i>
• <i>Nawsheen Hosonally, Mauritius</i>	• <i>Apeh Omede, Nigeria</i>
• <i>Julius N. Ingweye, Nigeria/Canada</i>	• <i>Luis F. Suarez, Peru</i>