

Towards a **“Young-People Platform in Agricultural Research for Development” (YPARD)**

Introduction

It is commonly agreed that Agriculture Research for Development (ARD) can potentially play an important role in poverty alleviation, in reaching for these poor farmers. Nevertheless, a couple of years ago the Assistant DG of FAO stated: “It is alarming to note that the number of students in agriculture schools is declining rapidly.¹”

In the same line, at a recent meeting of EFARD (European Forum for Agricultural Research for Development) in Zurich it was noted that most of the present were senior researchers. If ARD is to make a difference in people’ livelihoods, it is essential that young² researchers are involved in the process, and ensure that ARD has a future face to be shown. While the senior researchers bring experience to the floor, the younger professionals bring innovation, openness and enthusiasm.

The few young professionals present at EFARD gathered to discuss this, and decided upon the creation of a Young-People Platform in ARD. Over the subsequent months, e-mail discussions and stakeholder consultations took place. The present concept note is the result of this process.

YPARD

The main objectives of YPARD are presently drafted as:

- Encourage and motivate young people to take up ARD related activities;
- Promote knowledge, Innovation and change in ARD;
- Support learning and exchange between younger professionals.

Many ARD organisations have accepted that to alleviate poverty in rural areas the focus should be shifted from production and productivity to more market access of agricultural products by small-holder farmers, local governance and functional policies. This shift has added emphasis on various disciplines such as socio-economics, marketing, food-science, nutrition, etc. that are relatively new within ARD. It has also encouraged scientists to take on farmers’ knowledge, and the need to take farmer as an active actor in ARD partnerships. For these partnerships and inter-disciplinary work to really materialise, a more inter-technical combined with curricula reform in education system needs to be in place. Younger people can be the catalyst behind such a change. The younger generation of Agricultural researchers has a potentially important role to play in bridging “research” to “development”, bringing a new paradigm for ARD into place. By learning, exchanging and dialoguing with each other, and having new paths opened within their organisations, young researchers can better advocate for their own ideas and ideals. In other words, YPARD believes that not only need more interest for ARD, but new ARD itself is needed.

¹ The future of agriculture: Challenges for environment, health and safety regulation of pesticides from a presentation made by Louise O. Fresco, Assistant Director-General, Agriculture Department, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, to the OECD Working Group on Pesticides, Paris, 4 February 2002.

² Young, according to the World Youth Day's definition, is someone belonging to 16 to 36 age bracket. We here opt to use a slightly wider perspective, including those from 16 to 40 years. This is done in order to take into consideration the fact that many Southern people under 40s are still engaged in their post-graduate education, and could therefore, not yet be considered “senior”.

YPARD constitutes a multi-stakeholder platform for young people working on Agricultural Research for Development, bringing together young people working at NGOs, government research institutes, international research institutes, and young farmers. Young people from different sectors, facing the problems themselves, are better able to suggest the necessary change, and disseminate adequate innovations into ARD.

In terms of intervention strategies, several are the possibilities at hand:

- Lobbying for introduction of integrative skills in undergraduate curricula towards more synchronised natural-social sciences education;
- Providing young agricultural researchers already working with more opportunities to exchange their experiences and update their knowledge through regular meetings/seminars targeting specifically identified themes/needs;
- Proving young professionals with more opportunities to engage in development oriented action-research;
- Facilitating the dissemination of information amongst (and from) young professionals involved in agricultural research for development.

A clear link should be made with already existent initiatives, building on student movements, research schools, university networks and training programmes which already have been working towards ARD in different countries in the North and South.³

As a first step towards delimiting the focus, approach and activities of the Platform, a number of Northern and Southern young professionals, NGO representatives, members of farmer associations involved in ARD will come together in a side event of the Annual General Meeting of the Global Forum for Agriculture Research- in Morocco, in December 2005. There, it is anticipated that the group will further refine the concept note and define the focus of the initiative.

³ E.g. NOVA University Network - The Nordic Forestry, Veterinary and Agricultural University Network; Convergence of Sciences programme coordinated at Wageningen University; IIAS – international association of students in agriculture and associated sciences.