



“Youth in extension: are we making the most of our young assets?”

Outcomes of YPARD and GFRAS e-discussions



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The **young generation** plays an important role in **extension and rural advisory services**. It has to solve many of the current global issues and will face new ones. To rise to the challenge, young professionals working in extension and rural advisory services should be paid greater attention, provided an opportunity to share their experiences, voice their concerns and communicate the challenges and opportunities for youth in extension.

We believe that there are **many interesting and rewarding opportunities** in this professional field that must be better communicated. The image of agriculture, and in particular advisory services, must be made more attractive to young people.

Therefore **GFRAS: Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services** and **YPARD : Young Professional’s Platform for Agricultural Research for Development** have joined forces to advance a joint mission of promoting the field of agriculture and extension among young people.

E-discussions on issues surrounding youth and extension/advisory services, was held for 2 months, **in September and October 2011** on the [YPARD web forum](#).

These discussions focused on the challenges and opportunities for youth in extension, including:

- Experiences, challenges, and successes of **Young Professionals** in extension.
- **Experienced Professionals** explaining the challenges and opportunities of working with young professionals in extension and rural advisory services.

Acknowledgement

We would like to thank the contributors of these e-discussions – youth and supporters of the youth - for their interest, commitment, valuable ideas and enthusiasm to share their experience and learn from others. We also appreciate the willingness they showed in promoting this event. We are glad to count you as YPARD members:

- Darlington Kahilu, Zambia
- Julius Ingweye, Nigeria
- Raymond Zvavanyange, Zimbabwe
- Nawsheen Hosenally, Mauritius
- Prof. J. George, India
- Adnan Al-Asbahi, Yemen
- Ngouambe Nestor, Cameroun
- Michel Havard, France
- Okello Cosmas
- Maxwell Mkondiwa, Malawi
- Moses Owiny, Uganda
- Izkewaka
- Peter Stradiot
- Patrice Djamen, Burkina Faso

We also thank our network who helped spreading the word about this online event.

Youth and extension/advisory services e-discussions outcomes

12 topics were initiated by YPARD members with 53 comments posted and more than 2091 views. Experiences in the field were shared from Zambia, Mauritius, Cameroun, Nigeria and India.

Challenges

“Youth cynicism of an agricultural career” (Julius)

Extension is not seen as a promising career path among young people today. Questions that were asked include ‘how can we keep youth in the rural areas’?

Depending on the country, there are two different challenges:

- **Fighting against agriculture’s negative image and sensitizing youth to agriculture,**
- **Addressing the difficulties of living in rural areas**

In Zambia, the sector attracts students who **like the idea of sharing and passing on their knowledge and skills**. But once started with their job, the **rural area conditions limit their enthusiasm**. In Mauritius, there is not much difference between rural and urban areas, but it is agriculture *per se* which doesn’t attract the youth: because of the **lack of economic opportunities compared to other sectors**. It is mainly due to the fact that living conditions in rural areas are seen as difficult and the fact that agricultural work is not seen as lucrative. Julius, in Nigeria, talks about: “a profession of drudgery, not lucrative and unable to sustainably support their livelihoods” which “would not take them to town or enable them live normal modern lives.”

In Nigeria, “**students in the faculty of agriculture are often slighted by others**”; which impacts upon their self-esteem and diminishes their motivation. (Julius) Few young people decide to get involved in extension in Mauritius. They prefer to study management and engineering. **Can we find bridges between these more ‘popular’ careers and extension?**

Agriculture is not seen as very professional by the youth: “if it were, emoluments and conditions of service of professionals in the agricultural sector could have been close”. Professional egos are more attracted to lucrative areas. (Julius)

Agriculture is seen as time consuming. “It takes much longer time to achieve a breakthrough in the field of agriculture than it would normally take for those in politics, oil or banking.” (Julius)

Agriculture is the last resort. “Most of the students who found themselves in the faculty of agriculture never initially applied for the course when sitting for the entrance exams but only found their way in either as a last resort or were offered the option to take up agriculture or lose admission.” (Julius)

The contributors agree on the necessity to **make agriculture more attractive**. Youth should undertake the challenge with **devotion and passion**, with the idea of **bringing a positive change in communities**. Ngouambe brings a compromised plan as initiated in Cameroun: some young professionals in extension take a relay to share their knowledge on a period of 2 years before going back to the city.

Challenges of young extension workers

Require:

- More **communication**. The infrastructure and living conditions force rural inhabitants to feel isolated. Due to poor road conditions, extension experts face transport challenges in accessing farms sometimes.
- More **Information** at all levels is required to make successful extension and advisory services: to keep up-to-date socio-economic, political, technical and scientific information.
- **Access to new research technologies is limited** and technologies keep changing! Extension workers need to stay updated!
- **More soft skills**: Extension requires working in the field which shows a number of challenges and requires specific skills, notably a number of soft skills related to listening, communicating, continuously learning, adapting to specific rural contexts, training etc .
- **Ability and favorable environment to work in an inter-generational team**. Difference of age and experience can create some conflicts.
- **More awareness on farmers' living conditions from the urban youth who get involved in extension**. We observe an "erosion of Indigenous Knowledge among most of the youths as they view agriculture to be primitive and any indigenous knowledge or food totally ancient and archaic". Maxwell. The youths working in extension must embrace the knowledge that the farmers have and endeavor to understand it before labeling the farmers as laggards, notably youth grown up in urban centers receiving little awareness at school.

In Mauritius, there is an extension services headquarter and 16 sub-offices spread into the country. The headquarter has an information unit which publishes new research then distributed in the sub-offices. Farmers need more qualified extension professionals to update them on new technologies.

Informing extension workers - Mauritius

However *"It is a perception that **urban youth** do not understand farmers or agriculture. It is dependent upon the environment in which the person has been exposed and the opportunities that he/she has, with respect to agriculture. Concerning the extension staff who are already in the sector and do not understand farmers, I believe that a Training Needs Analysis should be carried out in the organisations concerned to see where the gaps are and from these, training programmes can be designed and implemented to minimise the problem."* Nawsheen

- **More equipment, notably information and communication technologies.** Professionals in extension are poorly equipped with ICTs. The new generation wants to use new technologies for making the services more effective but in some places computers and internet are still a luxury and other countries face power issues in rural areas where extension workers are based.
- **More and regular trainings based on needs.** Capacity building is relevant to extension professionals who need to be up to date with technical agricultural information as well as new technologies and agri-business/entrepreneurial knowledge. There is a particular need for computer and web2.0 skills as extension is mainly about information and communication. As farmers are also gaining increasing knowledge, extension professionals need to keep up with the game to be able to serve farmers. There exist e-learning platforms for social media and web 2.0 tools, where extension professionals can get access. Graduates should also be given the opportunity to work in the field at early stage to know the reality of the work.
- **Need of basic farming skills but not with traditional extension methods of T&V, workshop, seminars which takes much of their time.** It is better to produce video documentaries of

“As it has been mentioned, extension agents do not understand farmers and consider them as ancient and laggards. But how to solve this? From my own training in agricultural extension at the University, we had a module on rural sociology, in which we have studied the life of farmers. Other modules on extension itself helped us to understand perception of farmers, decision making process, adoption process, extension approaches, how to choose the best extension method, how to conduct demonstration or training etc. But according to me, the best way to understand farmers is to be involved with them. Students in agricultural extension should have more practical trainings in the field with farmers than lectures as it is more effective. During my training I had to carry out a Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) for an assignment and got the opportunity to meet farmers, see what they are doing in their fields and at the same time learn from them as they shared some indigenous knowledge with us (some sow their seeds depending on the visibility of the moon, others showed us "their way" of controlling pests and diseases in their field without using chemical substance etc.). More on my experience of the Rapid Rural Appraisal here: <http://nawsheenh.blogspot.com/2010/09/j...nsion.html>. Despite having been involved in the field, I maintain that at least 6 months training in the field is required for agricultural extension students in their training as 6 weeks' is not enough to understand extension and the farmers.” Nawsheen

Training of extension officers for them to understand farmers

trainings, spiced with entertaining songs and motivational speeches to catch their attention”, according to Julius. They can watch these at their own leisure. It however implies a cost that to produce such videos and to need watching equipment. Patrice emphasizes the need of more dynamic training and less theoretical, with more field visits and use of ICTs.

- Use of **ICTs and innovation** might be the key for making agriculture more attractive, keeping the youth in rural areas and ensuring their knowledge remains updated. (1) **How many aps have been created in extension? (2) What are some of the programs that encourage innovativeness in extension?**
- Additional **funding sources/diversification of employment**
- More **support from organizations and from the government**
- **Better remuneration.** Nawsheen, Izkewaka and Patrice express the low standard of extension professions.
- **Good housing** (with assistance of the government) and good mode of **transportation** for motivating young people to work in extension.
- For the essential component in extension which is **TRUST** between the farmer/entrepreneur and extension agent. More professionalism will provide greater **credibility** for youth extension workers in their field. This will enhance a culture change, whereby young extension workers will be able to interact with more experienced and older persons on an equal footing. It will, as one young professional says, further enhance the idea that “a young persons’ idea can be fundamentally valuable”.

Challenges of young recipients of extension services

Require:

- Require more information than their elder counterparts
- Desire for instruction on using more up-to-date technological tools and ICTs
- Real-life examples of what is happening on the ground with other people
- Confidence in the information that they receive so that they can be confident in their decision-making
- Greater capital
- Greater networks and contacts for partnerships

The power of the youth and taking advantage of opportunities

“ Youth can attract the attention better on the fact that time has changed!” Patrice

“Youth, by writing reports of quality will get a voice on a political level” Ngouambe

Making the most of our youth assets

“Young people are adventurous, insightful and with gamut of energy to drive ideas to things. Youth interest lies in things that are new, fun and offer opportunities. Also, young people’s interest in cable television networks is passionate. They want a livelihood that is lucrative. They want to be educated. They like peer company. They like the newest electronic gadgets in town. They like watching home

video/movies. They like being respected as professionals. They like music and fashion. They would wish to settle down fast, drive big cars and top notch mansions. They often do not have time for boring things. The extension system has to key into these valuable characteristics of the youth.” Julius

The features of extension

Extension and rural advisory services is characterized by many features such as extension agents, organizations, methods, systems and approaches. These features can be viewed as broad or narrow depending on the institution or agents. Given that extension evolved over the years from its focus on practical applications to encompassing the human aspects, Raymond poses the question: what are the features of extension? What makes extension stand out? Is it the ability to communicate a farming message, to work with farmer's groups, to carry out a demonstration, to collaborate with research organizations? Nawsheen says that while demonstration is a key component, it alone is not always effective. Young Professionals must choose **which extension method and tools to choose in which situation**. One needs to **understand the learning process**. These skills come with experience and training in the field, she says.

ICTs in extension will be more and more important. Professionals need to become confident in using them as different extension tools. Proper knowledge skills and attitudes are required by the extension officer, which should be updated regularly.

“The sources of inputs for African farmers are quite diverse. These range from big companies to individual agro-dealers found across countries. Therefore, agro-dealers are the link between the farmer and the major sources of inputs. As such, agro-dealers are key to input and other service delivery to the farmers. The Alliance for Commodity Trade in Eastern and Southern Africa (ACTESA) through the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) designed a COMESA Regional Agro Input Programme (COMRAP), to among other things build the capacity of the agro-dealers and their agents to run businesses professionally so as to improve input deliveries to smallholder farmers in the region. In Zambia, a number of agro-dealers training workshops have been conducted by ACTESA across the country so as to equip them with skills that range from managing working capital to costing and pricing.

“I feel this is a responsibility that youths can to and engage themselves in as they are better placed to understand the necessary knowledge and skills that are required in running agro-dealers businesses: capacity to manage businesses professionally and sustainably for serving farmer with quality. This will not only enable youths provide extension and advisory services to farmers but will also act as an employment opportunity”. Darlington, Zambia

Nawsheen however mentions that there are many agro-chemical suppliers in Mauritius and most of them are well-established companies that are not facing same challenges. Cosmas, from his side, emphasizes the financial support needed by the youth.

Agro-business, an opportunity for the youth? – example from Zambia and Mauritius

Advantage of agriculture

- “It is easier to enter a career in agriculture”
- The business space unlike in other sectors is very wide.
- There is always demand for agriculture as eating is vital.
- You may not need high level professional training and skills
- “Anybody can hit it big here if he has the passion, patience and is ready to learn.
- We can notice that some rich people often fall back to agriculture for a sustainable living, according to Julius. Most big farms in Nigeria are owned by past military officers turned politicians, career politicians, retired bankers and oil company workers. It is because there is a profit hidden.

Youth need support!

We need to work with them to support the implementation of innovations in extension and advisory services; improving the sector and its interest to today’s youth.

Young farmers also need a system that they can trust with their economic future in farming and one that will support them to produce for future food security.

- We need to examine **what the youth learns at different levels of education.** *“The youths in agricultural colleges should be well acquainted with the thinking and rationalities of the farmer. The understanding of the local knowledge should be a priority. This can be done by inviting indigenous knowledge holders in different communities offer deliberate informal trainings to the students in doing courses in extension services”.* (Maxwell)
- **Support from experienced professionals:** seniors can transmit their knowledge to the youth and support their cause, with their experience and recognition, to get more voice from the government and political bodies.
- **A strong linkage between research officers, extension officers & the farmers, and participatory approach should be used instead of top-down approach in extension.”** Says

The Ministry of Agriculture and rural development in Cameroun has a programme called “Agricultural extension and Research program” which ensures extension services and advisory services around all villages in Cameroun. The advisors are agriculture agents, technicians, engineers etc. The youth works in extension during 2 years and follow-up with monitoring and evaluating their actions, after some time. M&E outcomes would notably enable to discuss actions needed with leaders in charge of agricultural policy (the training of trainers for example). Farmers expressed their satisfaction.

Extension Governmental programme in Cameroun

Nawsheen. When officers don't take the feedback of the extension officers into consideration, it might end up with a gap between researches and the need of a community. "The research generated may therefore not be in-line with the need of the farming community. This implies a waste in the resources invested in the research (finance and time), which is not sustainable.

- **Business plan development.** Youth need better decision making and thorough knowledge. Better strategic planning is required for sustainable agricultural advisory services projects for the youth. They need organizations to help them to build viable projects that would then be eligible for financial support.
- They need **financial support.** The youth needs credit in form of input and startup cash in order to get started with their career. They need adapted micro-finance and to be aware of supportive organizations. Darlington mentions that government should put in place policies which allow youth to access financial loans from banks for them to start their agribusiness. However "agriculture loans are often siphoned by politicians" and "bank chosen by the government to administer these loans often connive with these public traitors" in Nigeria, say Julius. Furthermore, they "put all sorts of insurmountable

Jobs in extensions are few in Mauritius. Young professionals who studied extension need to find another job or be entrepreneur.

At the opposite, extension professionals need to provide assistance to around 750 farmers, says Nawsheen. There is a need for more positions. But more positions imply more offices, more salaries, and more transport facilities, which leads us to conclude that more investment needs to be made in agricultural extension which will also solve the problems of poor salary, badly-equipped offices and transport facilities.

There seem to be the same problem in Zambia with the Ministry of Agriculture in Zambia who employs a certain number of the students in extension after their certificate but a shortage in the employment of students after their diplomas.

There are three major institutions which provide extension services but also private companies which offer "partial" extension services in Mauritius. It might be easier to get jobs in these private companies than the public sector. However, the complete extension services provided to farmers remains that in the public sector.

Question remains whether farmers will be ready to pay for extension services. This will depend highly on their satisfaction regarding the extension services they are presently being provided in terms of getting the right and accurate information at the right time... (This situation will probably not be same in all countries).

Nawsheen, Mauritius

Youth, extension and employment – Mauritius and Zambia

hurdles on the paths of these youths in order to frustrate them from getting the loans and then later lending the money out to non agriculture sectors that would bring in quick and lucrative returns. For example we all know that agriculture investment is long term but the bank often insist on one year repayment schedule instead of the medium to long term repayment plans."

- Youth practicing Extension **in urban areas** are forgotten and also need support like their peer in rural areas
- Ngouambe expressed that **youth needs to be included in political debates**. He suggests that it is **by conducting strong research and technical reports** that young professional gain the credibility to do so.
- **What is the role of the government** in addressing:
 - poor infrastructure. Housing for extensionists is worse than farmers’.
 - lack of equipment,
 - lack of availability and access to information,
 - migration of the youth in urban areas,
 - lack of interest in agriculture and related professions
 - Re-engineer the agriculture finance and credit subsector
- **The government needs to build strategies and political programmes taking in account the specific needs of the youth (education, installation)**. They also need to be integrated in the debates.

"It can be said that it is high time for the Governments to invest in agricultural extension, generate policies in this area and involve youth in this process as nothing for the youth is done without the youth!" Says Nawsheen

The government should consider the involvement of youth in agriculture at the National level through different projects and initiatives. *"Something must be done to PULL them into the field, instead of pushing them into something they are not interested about."* (Nawsheen)

- **Public and Private sectors roles for employment**

Should we focus on the public sector role or more entrepreneurship from the private sector or...?

Peter who is a paid extension officer (Not linked to a company or a government) helps young people to gain skills and knowledge. **He feels that he gains as well - having an extra hand and a fresher approach from the youth perspectives as well as budget and support from some organizations.** This 1 year experience in the field with farmers and mentor seemed relevant to other participants as it would certainly help youth to get experience in agriculture and acquire the skills required by an extension officer. **Internship opportunities** (for a period of 6 months or even 1 year) can be offered to youth in these agricultural extension organizations.

How do we make it happen?

- **The best way to promote extension is to emphasize it as key factor for “change”:** improving the farming system and bettering life. Nawsheen believes that *“there are many youth who believe in contributing for a change and making a positive impact on the society. Surely these can attract such category of youth.”*
- **Raising awareness and sensitization on extension.** Nawsheen emphasizes that young people actually don’t KNOW about extension, even among the students who chose agriculture-related subjects. *“They will choose biotechnology or food science instead of extension as they have no idea what it is about.”*, she says. She gives very concrete examples of awareness raising activities such as: posters, flyers, videos on the organizations’ websites, experiences of extension officers, photos of the field work, training of farmers.
- Change youth’s perception by **analyzing behaviors** and tailoring our action from there, says Julius. Using the principles of behavior change communication, we need to know what young people like and what they do not, in order to make agriculture to their liking. *“Targeting their behavior, likes and dislikes is the energy and cost saving way to harness young people’s skills and address their genuine fears about what agriculture is or is not to their lives.”* How: target their interests through their channels of communication. We need to adapt to youth behavior by studying it and understanding it. This is a long process which requires time.
- **We need motivational speakers and counselors right from early education to the university and the secular agribusiness sector.** We need to enlarge the scope of the traditional extension field to the university campus and training institutions. *“The farmers shouldn’t be the main focus of extension but even intending farmer and other youths who are yet to choose a career.”*
- **The extension workers themselves need more training in counseling and motivational speaking.**
- **The use of ICTs and social media is important.** Social networks in the field of agriculture such as YPARD, FARANET and RESEARCHGATE where young people and professionals can meet virtually, share and solve problems. This limits cost, time and geographic limitations.

“Taking Mauritius as example, recently for the World Food Day, the Ministry of Agro-Industry and Food Security organised an exhibition and sale of agricultural products, whereby the whole agricultural sector was present in one place. This gave the population, including children and youth to have an idea about the innovations in the agricultural sector, and this event attracted many youths who were buying seeds and day-old chicks. More can be read here: [http://nawsheenh.blogspot.com/2011/10/1 ... d-day.html](http://nawsheenh.blogspot.com/2011/10/1...d-day.html)” Nawsheen

The role of the government to take initiatives to get the youths in agriculture - Mauritius

“Today we cannot talk about attracting youth in agriculture without mentioning the use of ICTs in agriculture and agricultural extension. Youths are the group who use ICT tools extensively (mobile phones, computers, iPads etc.) and the very fact that these are presently being used in agriculture may help in attracting them in the sector.” Nawsheen

- **Include agriculture in the school curriculum as from the primary level**, get youth involved in activities related to agriculture so that they can develop an interest in the subject (through essay contests, gardening competitions, getting involved in sensitization campaigns on poverty & hunger etc), show-case success stories of youth who are in agriculture (which can encourage them to step in the agricultural sector). These are just few examples of some initiatives that may be taken to attract youth to agriculture.
 - That it is also **the role of the government to take initiatives to get the youths in agriculture.**
-