Breaking grounds for a strong YouthinRAS Global Network

Finding a professional arena in which you feel at ease and make it your comfort zone, for youth nowadays, is a challenging issue. Hiring opportunities in most development sectors are becoming scarce and competitive over time. The rate of unemployment and under-employment as well as the need for youth to acquire technical capacities to prosper are on the rise.

Agriculture indeed has been identified as the sector that offers a wide range of job opportunities for youth as it bears a wide variety of cross-cuttings issues, which are interesting fields youth can explore, get the necessary capacities to properly engage in them, develop innovative ideas, create wealth and job opportunities for young people.

Why Agricultural Extension and Rural Advisory Services for Youth?

Agricultural Extension and Advisory Services (AEAS) for Agriculture and Rural Development (ARD) is one of the cross-cutting fields, which is still under-exploited in all low and middle-income countries across the globe. Considered as a potential and reliable link binder between all the segments across the agricultural value chain, advisory services act as a function that supports rural people to obtain skills and information; and to address challenges so as to improve their livelihoods and well-being. Not just technical innovations but also organisational and institutional innovations, with the anticipated end result being improved livelihoods. The Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS) vision seeks to see rural advisory services effectively contributing to Agricultural Innovation Systems (AIS) for sustainable development. Its last annual meeting held in Australia last year, ended on a positive note as youth onsite decided to unite, work together and form a global YouthInRAS network. Brainstorming sessions have been going on after the meeting by the YPARDians who attended that event in close consultation with the GFRAS secretariat, to reflect deeply on how it can be established and its operational attributions among others. Being a network meant for youth, their opinion is needed to ensure an efficient consolidation and global engagement when it shall be set. This gave rise to the launching of a YouthInRAS webinar series that aims at regrouping these young actors so that they can merge their thoughts, share ideas and provide insightful propositions for this global youth network to fully come to life.

A successful first move

A YouthinRAS working group came up with this idea to organize, as a first move, a series of webinars that will be a tangible argument to showcase their engagement to achieve this prospect to the GFRAS Steering committee. It was therefore crucial to count on the support and involvement of other youth and practitioners in this field to contribute in the structurization of this
network while developing their capacities in Rural Advisory Services topics through this activity and to incite a global youth movement that shall enhance more creativity to GFRAS as a supporting global organisation.

The Youth in RAS webinar's core theme is **Youth-led RAS strategies: what now, where to in policy and advocacy within RAS.** Being a series of three, the first session was scheduled on the February 15th 2018 and its core objectives were:

- To enable youth to understand the **various areas of intervention** of agricultural extension and advisory services;
- To empower youth to **identify themselves** as keen actors in RAS;
- To engage youth to start reflecting on the role of **policy and advocacy** within RAS and how they can influence decision making arenas.

For sure, stress and uncertainty was at its peak, since it was a one of a kind activity for youth involved in this field. With a ten-day strategic promotional campaign launched, one hundred and fifty people registered for this session; about ninety confirmed their presence in the meeting room and at most fifty were present during the activity. Indeed, with a high number of presence from the western African and southeast region of the globe, the speakers Alpha Sennon (founder of WHYFARM and Member of YPARD Trinidad and Tobago) and Natalie Ernst (Programme Officer at GFRAS) valued their role and gave insightful knowledge-based presentations to participants on how the youth can identify themselves in this field, where they can engage, professionalize and practically contribute in improving farmers’ living standards. (The PowerPoint presentations are accessible [here](#)).

The participants posed various questions which gave way to an open and interactive session between the speakers and the attendees. The floor was given to those who desired to speak and share their thoughts, experiences and ideas about the issue addressed. From this pile of queries, we can recall the following ones on:

- What is GFRAS’ definition of youth? (From Nelsha Shillingford, a Dominican Mphil in Agricultural Extension, 2nd year at UWI);
- Is the incorporation of ICT in RAS considered in GFRAS for youth involvement as the way forward? (From Yelita Colmenarez working in CABI, Brazil);
- How do we advocate for a gender balance in youth participation in RAS? (From Patricia Biermayr-Jenzano, Adjunct Professor: Women, Youth and Gender Studies from the University of Georgetown, USA);
- How different is the "Youthilized" Extension through RAS from the Traditional-National Agriculture Extension Programs, which in my opinion and in Africa in general is no longer relevant or even active and are no longer taking place in many countries? (From Innocent Chamisa, consultant at FAO, Italy).
Youth in RAS Webinar series (1st Part)
February 2018

Registered Participants

- 155

Year of Experience in RAS

- 0 - 1
- 1 - 3
- 3 - 5
- > 5

Age Range

- 18 - 24 yrs (7.10%)
- 25 - 32 yrs (48.39%)
- Above 32 yrs (44.52%)

Regional Representation (%)

- West Africa: 25.2%
- Eastern Africa: 13.4%
- Oceania: 0.6%
- Central Africa: 16.1%
- Caribbean: 7.1%
- North Africa: 0.6%
- South Asia: 14.2%
- Europe: 5.8%
- North America: 12.3%
- Southeast Asia: 1.9%
- Central and South America: 0.8%
- Middle East: 0.6%
- South Africa: 0.6%

Source:
GFRAS Youth Working Group Registered PARTICIPANTS List
Responses to these questions were indeed greatly addressed by the speakers (recording of webinar downloadable on …) and it enhanced this suggestion to establish a group to keep the discussion going later. Suman Dey (2nd year Ph.D in Fisheries, extensionist ICAR-CIFE from India), supported Alpha Sennon’s presentation by mentioning that we should add value to the sector in this way and do the branding as well as enhance the status of agriculture stakeholders so that youth perceive it as an attractive profession like others such as doctors and engineers. Meanwhile Musa Usman Musa (an extension service provider in Kano state, Nigeria ) added that food security largely depend on good agricultural practices and what the GFRAS youth working group is aiming to do in order to develop the capacity of our farmers is good.

The next step

Pressing the hand brake at this stage will for sure be a mess and a pity after all the positive energy acquired and generated from that session. A community practice group for YouthInRAS has been created and is open for all interested youth and practitioners in this field to join. A further online D-group of YouthInRAS might as well see the light soonest but one thing is certain, the upcoming webinar that shall solely focus on “Policy and Advocacy within RAS for youth”, will be even more exciting, thanks to prospective speakers like Nestor Ngouambe, Hlami Ngwenya and Jim Cano Leandro. If you do not know who these people are, google it and you wouldn’t be deceived by how much Google knows them.

Stay connected and see you at the 2nd YouthInRAS Webinar session!!!

Join the YouthInRAS online discussion group on…. Or send a mail to semarc27@gmail.com for addition