‘Thesis Fellowship’ for MSc Programme on Integrated Drylands Management - Call 2015-2016

[UNU-INWEH: YPARD: ICARDA]
Deadline for applications: July 30th, 2015

Proposed Master’s Thesis Topic: Research study on ‘Youth and Agriculture in the Drylands’

The lack of engagement of rural and urban youth in agriculture, compounded with the declining interest among young professionals in pursuing agricultural development related careers has resulted in an ageing system. Despite the recognition of the importance of engaging youth within the agricultural development community, a cohesive approach has not yet been defined and efforts remain fragmented and piecemeal.

While some research has been undertaken in this field, it is still emerging and more information is required to develop appropriate strategies, policies and programmes. Youth remain a highly diverse group of people, with different backgrounds, drivers and experience leading to varying ideas, aspirations and challenges. To effectively capture their viewpoints, their aspirations, and their realities with regards to agriculture, well designed research is required to target different youths in rural, peri-urban and urban regions, at different levels of wealth and education. Youth are a critical component of this talent and are necessary for sustainable drylands systems in the years to come. We must harness youth talent for innovation and development for sustainable drylands management.

Project description

This thesis will contribute to the development of youth targeted programmes in the drylands (or the drylands youth strategy). Additional research will be undertaken by YPARD and the master’s thesis is designed to complement and add value to the research team’s work which entails:

a) Diagnostic analysis including adapting multidisciplinary methods and tools to identify youth issues (by gender, socio-economic class, ethnicity, etc.), specific knowledge gaps and entry points, and improve targeting.
b) Analytical study to identify youth issues, specific knowledge gaps and entry points to improve targeting.
c) Review Study: benefits of improved participation and leadership by youth in integrated resource management.

The outputs of the thesis will feed into drylands youth strategy that aims to target youth who are active and/or employed in the agricultural sector and those who are unemployed, underemployed or working in the informal sector. The strategy is aimed to achieve the goal: ‘Youth have better access to and control over productive assets, inputs, information, and market opportunities and capture a more equitable share of increased income, food, and other benefits’.

The focus will be upon rural youth, but urban youth will be included for additional perspectives. Inclusion of elders and others in the community is also important to understanding context, attitudes and opportunities.
Geographical Coverage
This study will cover the three agricultural livelihood systems in Drylands: Pastoral, rain-fed and irrigated land and will focus to examine:

- **Anticipating dryland futures**: Research that enables youth to create opportunities and promote innovation in rural areas. Recommendations to ensure that there is a viable future for youth in the drylands;
- **Co-producing knowledge for win-win options**: youth have knowledge that is not often collected in traditional research. Additional input provides a more comprehensive understanding of the current situation and potential future for youth and employment in the drylands.
- **Facilitating policies, institutions and governance for scaling and enabling innovation**: A research thesis will feed into the larger programme that will guide interventions to the needs and aspirations of young people in drylands. Subsequent programmes targeting the needs of young people support the potential for increased innovation.

Objectives

a) To identify knowledge gaps in the literature and where additional knowledge can strengthen the research base specifically within the drylands system;
b) To collect rigorous and up to date data on country and culturally variable drivers, aspirations and challenges of youth which will inform and enable the development of appropriate youth focused programmes based on expressed youth needs;
c) To outline recommendations for developing appropriate policies for youth in agriculture in the drylands project sites

Suggested Research Methods

- Desk review study to discern trends and potential areas of youth development especially focusing on drylands management
- In-depth interviews to capture aspirations and past and planned life trajectories with young people of different typologies.
- Focus groups in local areas to obtain feedback on norms, aspirations, and methods for tangibly engaging young people. Focus groups will target youth as well as influencers of youth. Influencers are those who will influence attitudes and future decisions of youth in the community. These may be community leaders, parents, teachers, religious leaders and local role models among other relevant individuals.

Activities

1. Undertake a literature analysis to assess the existing information related to youth aspirations and youth involvement with agricultural value chains with a focus on drylands areas and identify gaps where additional information is required;
2. Identify the key questions for the surveys and focus groups. These will be developed in collaboration with YPARD staff and resource persons and modified according to feedback from drylands CRP staff team as well as an additional experts on youth and agriculture issues;
3. Connect YPARD representatives, ICARDA staff and assigned research supervisors to obtain additional feedback on local study questions and areas of importance for youth engagement;
4. Compile data, information and knowledge for identified regions (where possible referring to the background outlined in Annexure 1*)

5. Develop a review document on the findings; and suggest youth appropriate programme interventions.

6. Disseminate the finding widely through media campaign to youth groups and agricultural development organisations (in support with YPARD and other program partners)

**Outputs**

- Master’s thesis report fills knowledge gaps and provide a better understanding of the realities and potential futures of youth in the drylands;
- Master’s studies reflects youth-expressed needs and suggestions on the development of appropriate and effective programmes targeting youth in the drylands;
- Along with the thesis the candidate is required to deliver a briefing note that will inform different stakeholders on appropriate actions to engage youth in the agricultural sector;

**Expected Timeline**

**Thesis: October 2015-March 2016**

The thesis will be conducted under the supervision of:

University- The candidate will have to identify a supervisor in the University where he/she is registered.

From the participating organisations the contact detail are as below:
YPARD – Ms Courtney Paisley, Director, YPARD
ICARDA – Gender and Youth coordinator, ICARDA
UNU- Dr Nidhi Nagabhatla [YPARD, SC Chair] & UNU-INWEH (nidhi.nagabhatla@unu.edu)

For inquires through YPARD, contact: Marina Cherbonnier: marina.cherbonnier@ypard.net

**Eligibility**

The candidate should be applying following the instructions at http://inweh.unu.edu/msc-drylands/.

**Apply by July 30th, 2015.**

Please indicate in your application that you are applying for the ‘Thesis Fellowship’ for Youth and Agriculture in the Drylands.

The candidate should ideally be registered in a master’s degree program in social science or agriculture science discipline in his/her university (generally the application is open to all related disciplines)

Application from YPARD members will be given preference.
Annexure 1*: Comprehensive Review Guiding Background for Reference

The questionnaire framework is meant to guide the candidate during the course of the study and should not be considered as the casting stone. It is expected that the candidate will collect and analyse data, information and knowledge around the below listed aspects and engaging with a variety of stakeholders (virtual and face to face).

1. What are the aspirations of the youth
2. Impressions on rural life and perceptions of opportunities
3. What would be required for youth to remain in rural areas (if they want to leave). For those who want to stay, what attracts them?
4. Level of interest in agriculture (what do you like/dislike about it)
5. If there were opportunities in agriculture would this increase your interest in the topic? Would youth remain in rural areas for these opportunities?
6. Where can value addition be made in the agricultural sector in your community;
7. Where is there capacity to innovate in agriculture? What would be required for this (funds, land, training, networks, etc)
8. What are the challenges you see in agriculture? What would help you to overcome the current challenges? Are there gender specific challenges? What are these?
9. What skills and competencies are most important for young people in your community to be engaged in/successful in agriculture?
10. Do young people see changes in the agricultural sector? What are their perceptions of the use of ICTs within the agricultural sector and as a means of modernising it?
11. What are the skill gaps that young people face to engage successfully in agricultural development? What are other skills that youth and employers feel they require?
12. If the youth is engaged in the agricultural sector, why did they enter into their current vocation? Are they happy with their choice? If not, why not?
13. Is agriculture a viable profession with a reasonable financial return? Are they able to support themselves and their family?
14. Are young people able to access finance? How? What are the barriers? Are there supportive policies in place?
15. Are young people able to access land? What are the barriers? Are there supportive policies in place?
16. Are youth agricultural cooperatives a viable means of improving youth engagement in the agricultural sector? Do they work for young people?
17. Do any youth groups exist to support young people in their personal and career development. What services do they provide?
18. Where do youth obtain their information? How are they informed about opportunities in agriculture and government programmes? What is the best way to reach them?
19. How are youth able to network? What processes, networks and groups work best for them?
20. Are there any existing government, institutional or NGO/CSO programmes targeted towards youth? If so, what are they? Are they effective? Do they attract more youth into the agricultural sector?
21. How would youth like to see improved livelihoods?
22. Reflect on your life in 10 or 20 years in the drylands. Is agriculture a part of this? What would need to happen to make it so?
Annexure 2: Participating Organisations in this fellowship program

YPARD
Young Professionals for Agricultural Development (YPARD) is an international movement by young professionals for young professionals. The mission of YPARD is to serve as a global platform through which young professionals can express their ideas and realize their full potential towards a dynamic agricultural development. YPARD is a well-established platform with a proven track record in advocating on behalf of youth and bringing a strong youth voice into agricultural development debates and discussions. YPARD has been working with major institutions in the agricultural development sector since 2006 to mobilise people around youth issues, give youth a voice and look towards a sustainable future where youth are involved. YPARD’s four primary objectives include 1. Facilitating the exchange of information and knowledge among young professionals across disciplines, professions, age and regions; 2. Broadening opportunities for young professionals to contribute to strategic agricultural development policy debates; 3. Promoting agriculture among young people, and 4. Facilitating access to resource and capacity building opportunities. The global youth network has over 10,000 registered member’s worldwide working through regional coordination units which include:

UNU-INWEH
UNU-INWEH is one of 15 centers of excellence of the Tokyo-based United Nations University (UNU). Established by the UN General Assembly in 1974, UNU is an autonomous and independent entity, overseen by a Governing Council. With intellectual independence guaranteed through its Charter, UNU makes unique contributions to the advancement of knowledge and implementation of action for dealing with pressing issues of global concern. UNU-INWEH has built a strong reputation as the United Nation’s think-tank on water, and has demonstrated leadership in research and capacity building, closely coupled with high-level policy development. With exceptional capacity to bridge geographic scales of operations and to synthesize science into policy guidance, UNU-INWEH serves as strategic organization for undertaking policy-relevant knowledge mobilization and enhancement. UNU-INWEH has long been involved in steering scientific research and capacity development in drylands. UNU-INWEH’s mission is ‘to contribute, through capacity development and directed research, to efforts to resolve pressing global water problems that are of concern to the United Nations, its Member States and their Peoples’. The core concern is the global water crisis. Lack of adequate freshwater supplies and poor water management block the global effort to alleviate poverty and to meet the Sustainable Development Goals, and in particular, those goals that have been set for managing our water resources.

ICARDA
The International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) was established in 1977. It is one of 15 such centers supported by the CGIAR. ICARDA’s founding mandate to promote agricultural development in the dry areas of developing countries remains highly relevant today. ICARDA works with a tight focus on the problem-solving needs of resource-poor farmers, achieving this through the in-field delivery of its research outputs. Although global food production has increased by 20 per cent in the past decade, food insecurity and poverty remain widespread, while the natural resource base continues to decline. ICARDA’s biggest strength is its staff—highly skilled men and women from 32 countries. Its research and training activities cover crop improvement, water and land management, integrated crop-livestock-rangeland management, and climate change adaptation.