The youth is paramount in agricultural development

FANRPAN identified the youth as a special stakeholder group that is to be nurtured and included in the work that FANRPAN does. This initiative was prompted by the realisation that 20 percent of the African population is between the ages of 15 and 24. Looking at the African agricultural landscape it is quite a glaring sight that the youth is absent and those that are holding the fort are ageing. FANRPAN, with the support of the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation dedicated the 2011 FANRPAN High Level Regional Policy Dialogue to the youth, under the theme ‘Advocating for Youth Engagement in the Agriculture Value Chains.’

In this regard FANRPAN wanted to explore ways in which the youth could be brought into the agriculture policy arena, give the youth a voice and a chance for them to claim their space.

In her opening address, FANRPAN CEO Dr Lindiwe Majele Sibanda reiterated the organisation’s commitment to step up youth involvement.

“We will ensure that the youth is part of decisions about the future of agriculture in Africa as they are the generation that will have to ensure that the continent’s growing population is fed,” says Sibanda. This newsletter reports on some of the activities that took place during the regional dialogue and other agriculture activities involving the youth.

FANRPAN was honoured to host four cabinet ministers from the Swaziland government throughout the dialogue. They were the Minister of Agriculture, Clement Dlamini, the Minister of Housing and Urban Development, Lindiwe Dlamini, the Minister of Tourism and Environmental Affairs, Macford Sibandze and the Minister of Youth and Development, Hlobisile Ndlovu, who addressed the dialogue on youth issues in Swaziland.

Ndlovu made it clear that the government of Swaziland is committed to youth development and has over the years put in place measures to fast track youth development, including the adoption of the National Youth Policy in 2009. The Minister admitted that there were challenges for youth in agriculture such as access to land, finance and literacy and assured delegates that the National Youth Policy is there to address these challenges and break the barriers.

She also alluded to the fact that, Swaziland has a Youth Enterprise Fund that is there to help create jobs by providing micro-finance to skilled young people. It is a revolving fund with the first 500 young people benefiting from the E15 million (about R150 million) allocated.

She moved the house when she announced that her ministry’s slogan is ‘Nothing for the Youth without the Youth.’ The youth participants in the dialogue were so excited to hear this slogan as it sparked hope that finally someone is willing to work with them instead of working for them. It has been one of the youth’s complaints that things are decided for them without them - therefore, the minister’s slogan was quite relevant at this point in time.

The minister challenged the youth to take advantage of opportunities presented to them to make a difference in their communities, “You must break the barriers to ensure that Africans have food on the table at all times,” she said.

The minister captured the youth participants so much so that, immediately after her address they requested an impromptu sidemeeting with her to further engage with her.

Nothing for the Youth without the Youth – Youth Minister, Swaziland

“For the Youth without the Youth” – Youth Minister, Swaziland
In the side meeting, the youth asked her, as she was joined by the Chairman of the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Youth and the Principal Secretary of Agriculture, a host of questions -

One-on-one session with the Youth Minister

Grace Musimani, Uganda – Minister, what percentage of the youth fund goes to agriculture related initiatives? How is the youth encouraged to take up the fund for agriculture related initiatives?

Minister – The approach of the youth fund is that it funds whatever projects are proposed by the youth. There is no specified amount set aside for agriculture related initiatives. I can tell you that at the moment, 25 percent of the fund has been given to agriculture related initiatives.

One of the challenges cited by the youth when it comes to taking up agricultural activities is climate change. Youth see it as a deterrent as natural disasters are a risk and the fund would still expect repayment irrespective of the situation.

Hilma Angula, Namibia – What can be done to change the mindset of young people about agriculture? Do we need a song to change the world?

Minister – We need to dialogue more on youth issues for young people to understand that they are full citizens and have a responsibility to come up with new innovations to change the world.

We need to create an enabling environment for young people to unleash their potential as society needs it.

From Gogos to iPads - passing the baton to the youth

It is almost an acceptable phenomenon that agriculture, and farming in particular, is for old people and is not attractive to young people. Young people have removed themselves completely from this sector, as a result the current farming population comprises senior citizens. It may be attributed to the fact that, there are no platforms to exchange and transfer knowledge between generations.

FANRPAN, in line with the 2011 Dialogue theme of “Advocating for the Engagement of Youth in the Agriculture Value Chains” saw it fit to organise a session where the older generation would pass the baton to young people in an informal and lively manner. Two elders in the FANRPAN family, Gogo Makhotha from Zambia and Mama Thwala from Swaziland were more than happy to form a panel that would talk to the iPad generation.

Gogo Makhotha, a former school teacher from Zimbabwe, started farming after retirement. She started a feeding scheme when she realised that hungry children who don’t receive nutrition cannot assimilate knowledge. She has since initiated the Zambian Women in Agriculture project, supported by the South African High Commission in Zambia. Gogo Makhotha is also a member of the Associated Country Women of the World Organisation, and has participated in the organisation’s policy development initiatives.

Her message for the youth was “you should be innovative and hardworking and not be looking down on agriculture. It is important that the elders transfer knowledge to the youth. The youth should start by being respectful, humble and open to absorb information on how farming is done. The language barrier can be overcome by learning from others. Education and knowledge is power - whether old or new.”

Gogo Thwala, a former school teacher, now a farmer who recognised the opportunities that agriculture presents. She emphasised the point that the youth must never think they are too educated to be involved in agriculture. She bemoaned the fact that young people see the soil as “dirt” and want a “cleaner” entry point such as processing and marketing. She posed a question on “what is going to be processed if no-one is producing? Agriculture can improve the economy through planning and actions – and setting targets. The youth must always be aware,” she said.

The youth participants were humbled by the experiences of the Gogos and promised to take up agriculture to feed Africa and also commended the Gogos for holding the fort.
Youth participants from across Africa and the Diaspora shared their work with the Dialogue participants. Some of the case studies presented are:

Ms Maureen Agena, a Web 2.0 guru, working for the Women of Uganda Network, a nongovernmental organisation that empowers rural women and youth to access, utilise and apply information communications technology to address their development problems. She has passion for agriculture as she believes that it impacts everyone. Therefore, she uses her information communications technology knowledge and journalistic skills to support youth in agriculture by introducing them to new technologies and also writing about their work.

Ms Mariama Brown, representing the Pacific Agricultural and Forestry Policy Network, shared with the Dialogue two case studies from the organisation that promotes youth involvement in agriculture. The Rural Development Innovations Programme under the auspices of the Foundation of the People of the Pacific deals with youth in the rural areas in the Pacific. The programme allows the voice of the youth to be heard and to be acted upon with the youth being the main drivers of the process. The approach is to assist young people to have a prominent role in different projects and interventions which were designed and carried out by young people themselves. A university-run programme in partnership with the Fiji government is designed to attract young people to be independent and simultaneously to be innovative. The university assists students to open a bank account and the proceeds of the agricultural procedure are paid into the account to be assessed and managed by the students themselves. Candidates are learning through experience and are in charge of the process. It is a process of empowerment.

Resolutions from the dialogue

The FANRPAN 2011 High Level Food Security Dialogue came up with resolutions for further engagement and involvement of the youth in the agriculture value chains. These are:

- Youth initiatives be better supported and documented;
- Information be made available to the youth regarding opportunities in agriculture;
- Policy platforms which specifically include the youth be strengthened;
- Youth be engaged in providing evidence to inform policies on agriculture, natural resources and related sectors; and
- The youth’s knowledge of new media and information communications technology be harnessed to develop the agricultural sector.

FANRPAN would like to pay tribute to Mr Jose Fonseca of the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation who helped foster the collaboration between FANRPAN, the Pacific Agricultural and Forestry Policy Network and the Caribbean Agricultural Forum for Youth.

The voice of young professionals on Food and Water

A notable feature of the 3rd International Forum on Water and Food was in providing formal space to young professionals to actively participate in the forum. They were given their own sessions during the opening and final day plenaries and they created their own programme and agenda to get the most out of the forum sessions.

This was a lively demonstration of the value of the Challenge Program on Water and Food places on young professionals and the potential future pay-off from investing in their active participation in research-for-development.

More than ten students in local and international institutions are involved in Andes Basin development challenge projects. In the Limpopo Basin, young professionals are involved in the design and management of small water infrastructures and skills transfer. An important contribution of young professionals in the Nile has been the bridging of research with local communities and policy and decision makers.

In the Mekong, integrating productive functions with hydropower dam development is crucial. Here young professionals help bridge democratic processes for consensus building around hydropower and engage a new generation which is more socially and environmentally conscious.

During the panel discussion, everyone agreed that young professionals are comfortable with social networking and know how to use online tools. It was agreed that the Challenge Program on Water and Food will further support the establishment of a network so that young professionals within each of the basins has its own space for debate, consultation and mentorship.

The young professionals’ event was a significant step towards ensuring continuity of knowledge sharing and fostering learning among emerging professionals. Their engagement at the forum created an opportunity for them to identify opportunities and possible mentors among the older delegates.

Dr Lindiwe Sibanda, FANRPAN CEO and 3rd International Forum on Water and Food Policy Impact Panel member urged, “Young professionals, work hard in claim your space! Do not be modest. 66 percent of the population of Africa is youth. Nothing happens for youth without youth.
…from page 3
Claim your space in management, deliver keynotes and participate throughout the value chain. Do not restrict yourselves to what is already happening but say “this is what we would do if we were in charge”.

In response to this challenge the young professionals urged the Challenge Program on Water and Food to foster a conducive environment for emerging professionals to claim their space within the programme. The young professionals noted that - Emerging professionals have the potential to make significant contributions to development at various levels. However, the prevailing trend in development organisations and initiatives does not prioritise their meaningful engagement. As such young professionals’ contribution to research and research-for-development in particular, is not optimised. 

It is critical that development initiatives groom students and emerging professionals to contribute meaningfully to research-for-development.

The Challenge Program on Water and Food, with its basin development challenges, presents a great opportunity for emerging professionals to generate innovative research ideas that can add value to targeted development transformations.

A successful farmer - at 13!

Nondumiso Vilakati is a successful goat farmer in the Manzini region in the community known as Ngwazini – and 13 years old!

“I started keeping goats in 2009 with a stock of seven Nguni-breed goats, inherited from my grandmother,” says Nondumiso.

“I started improving the stock by cross breeding the Nguni-breed with a Boer breed which I bought for E800. By 2010 I was farming with 26 goats after buying six nannies. I have now also introduced a milk breed.

“My market is drop-in buyers and butcheries and I normally sell by live mass. Milk will be sold to local consumers.”

She says her biggest challenges are expensive feeds, the fact that the goat meat market is not well established, the lack of extension for young and the expensive goat breeding stock.

FANRPAN active on social media

FANRPAN has embraced social media like Twitter and is active in communicating and engaging with like-minded organisations and individuals. FANRPAN’s twitter activity gained momentum during the 2011 Dialogue, as the theme focused on youth and youth are the primary users of new media. During the Dialogue period, FANRPAN twitter page gained over 300 followers and added over 800 followings.

This is what some followers say…

Maureen Agena@maureenagena
What does gender mainstreaming mean to U in regard to the #youth? Is it implemented in your organisation? #FANRPAN #ardyis_cta

Jeanine Cooper@JMCooper2010
@FANRPAN: “40% of total unemployed in Africa are youths; 70% live in rural areas” In some countries the stats are even more stark

Maureen Agena@maureenagena
“The war against hunger & poverty in African can only be fought by investing in the youth”. Hon PM of Swaziland #oyw @ardyis_cta #FANRPAN

Maureen Agena@maureenagena
Representing@ardyis_cta at the @FANRPAN dialogue in Swaziland is @maureenagena @IsaacChanda @traoreinoussa and Navsheen. Totally honored.

FANRPAN@FANRPAN
Did you know? 44% of the population of Sub-Saharan Africa is under the age of 16, making it the youngest region in the world. @FANRPAN

Some of the key words tweeted during the dialogue -

About FANRPAN

The Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network (FANRPAN) is an autonomous regional stakeholder driven policy research, analysis and implementation network that was formally established in the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) in 1997. FANRPAN was born out of the need by SADC governments who felt that comprehensive policies and strategies were required to resuscitate agriculture. FANRPAN is mandated to work in all SADC countries and currently has activities in 16 Southern African countries namely Angola, Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. This document has been produced with the financial assistance of CTA. The views expressed herein are those of the author(s) and can therefore in no way be taken to reflect the official opinion of CTA; representative of FANRPAN or of the cosponsoring or supporting organizations.