

Introduction

On December 9th 2015 around 70 participants from 15 countries gathered for the seminar 'The Future of Our Food: How to Engage Young Women and Men in the Agricultural Sector?' on the Wageningen UR campus, to get inspired, exchange ideas, and meet other practitioners who are passionate about the topic of youth in agriculture. The seminar was an integral part of the short course 'Market Access for Food Security' of the [Centre for Development Innovation \(CDI Wageningen UR\)](#). The other organisers were [AgriProFocus](#), [KIT Royal Tropical Institute](#) and [Young Professionals for Agricultural Development \(YPARD\)](#).

Welcome and keynote speakers



The seminar was opened with a warm welcome and a networking exercise by course coordinator Jan Helder and facilitator Femke Gordijn (both CDI). After that, Marleen Brouwer (CDI) introduced the importance of paying attention to youth in agriculture, in order to secure stable food supplies, and to innovate the agricultural sector (find slides attached).

The first keynote speaker was José Carlos Martínez Hernández from [Reforestamos Mexico](#). He grew up at a farm, and although staying in agriculture was not a deliberate choice, he is still actively involved in that sector and in forestry. He noticed that the young people, with whom Reforestamos works, do not want to

live their parents' life, nor do they want to live like the people in the city. They try to find a balance between the unsustainable production methods of their parents and the challenges of modernity. Moreover, he noted: **"Decision-makers often find it hard to look at the full story, and that the reality is 'in the field' with the people who live there"**. José Carlos concluded his speech with listing the most important points to bring the topic of youth in agriculture further: **"Make connections, take risks, and become an inspiration to youth!"**

The second keynote speaker was Klarien Klingen, a 'freelance farmer' and active for [Toekomstboeren / Future Farmers Movement](#). Unlike José Carlos, Klarien made a deliberate choice to go into farming although she did not grow up on a farm. After her studies in Wageningen, she wanted to create and get into the practice of agriculture. Klarien asked the audience who farms him/herself. The seminar participants replied that they do not own land or do not have the time to produce food. She wondered if people would farm if they had (more) land and/or time, since farming means working long hours for little money. Currently she works as a farmer in her vegetable garden where people can harvest their own food: **"This gives me the opportunity to experiment with the soil, and the presence and influence of the value chain"**. She believes that it is time for young farmers to create more sustainable farming options: **"Toekomstboeren is exactly uniting these young people who start in agriculture, and who want to change the current food production system"**.

World Café sessions

After pitches by the six table hosts, participants attended two rounds of World Café sessions (30 minutes each). Following the rounds, each table host shortly explained the most important learning outcomes from his/her table in a plenary session:

1. *"Promoting agriculture and stimulating exchange among young professionals"* by Machteld Schoonenberg (YPARD):
 - Challenges experienced or seen for young farmers: 1) The negative image of agriculture; 2) Limited or no access to land; 3) Forced to join government-driven on-farm trainings; 4) Not profitable
 - Agriculture is not for everyone: it should be a deliberate choice to become or continue as a farmer. Without that drive, innovation cannot be expected of the youth. However, while we cannot deny and stop the trend of young people leaving the countryside, we can make agriculture a more attractive option for youth and discuss solutions food security and sustainable management of our agricultural system.
 - Some reasons to be drawn into agriculture: 1) Agriculture is simultaneously a challenge and an opportunity; 2) Being part of a movement in making the agricultural systems more sustainable; 3) There is much similarity in the way youth develop themselves around the world. You can connect to a young person through agriculture on the other side of the world, which is great! 4) Those doing hands-on activities have a different way of looking at life
 - What do we (young farmers) want to learn? 1) Practical, hands-on skills; 2) Peer-to-peer learning and exchange; 3) Young farmers as role-models and trainers to share experiences (i.e. youth training of trainers)
 - Events coming up: 1) YPARD Netherlands meeting (early 2016); 2) Future Farmers speed dating session (February 2016)
2. *"Unleashing young women and men's voices for youth responsive agricultural policy making"* by Rhiannon Pyburn (KIT):
 - Need for an articulated conceptual framework to comprehensively address youth issues, covering for example ICT, policy, capacity development, etc.
 - Youth in agriculture needs to be problematized so that we know what challenges need to be addressed – currently assumption-ridden
 - Heterogeneity: opportunities and challenges for young people are diverse and context-sensitive
 - Two angles need to be reconciled: 1) the needs of the agricultural sector e.g. for future farmers and future food security; and, 2) the need/priorities of youth e.g. for lucrative, interesting and fulfilling livelihoods
 - Evidence as to good practices on youth-responsive agricultural policy making need to be researched, collected, voiced, shared, promoted
3. *"Measuring performance by SMEs and lead firms on involving youth in agriculture supply chains"* by Simone van Vugt (CDI):
 - CDI sees monitoring as a tool to stimulate learning, sharing, building successes, and sharing stories. It creates opportunities for young people in agriculture
 - Several topics were discussed related to performance measurement on company but also educational level. Useful to create different measurement indicators on each level, but to still thrive for coherence
 - A good example is the member organisation African Agribusiness Academy (AAA) for SMEs, where challenges for youth in agribusiness are actively addressed and opportunities are explored by means of coaching, training and influencing policy. Now developing an app to track the performance of your SME on turnover, amount/kind of clients/farmers involved, use of technical innovations, ideas for future development, etc. which are all important indicators to motivate young entrepreneurs
 - One of the key questions to be answered: how to make measuring and learning interesting? How can this benefit the inclusion of young people in value chains?
 - Need for more (action) research on how performance measurement can be used to stimulate youngsters and women to be involved in supply chains. Also need for more clarity on how to collect and manage data, and how to involve young people here
4. *"Using a youth lens when designing and implementing agricultural projects and programs"* by Julia van Oord (MSc student Wageningen UR, together with AgriProFocus and Fair and Sustainable Advisory Services):

- Creation of dashboard that visualizes the status of conditions that influence youth involvement: land, perception and aspiration, finance, infrastructure and market access, income, and education. Two questions were discussed: 1) Does the dashboard fits practice and/or are there elements missing or in need of improvement? 2) Which interventions can improve these conditions and hence youth involvement in agriculture and determine how the dashboard can play a role here
 - The tool has certainly potential to become relevant, though it is a first concept and needs to be piloted and refined. However, it is not yet very clear what the dashboard exactly is about: a quick scan/needs assessment or a baseline? To gather more qualitative or quantitative information and data, more a static or dynamic tool? What do we exactly want to know, to measure? Furthermore: who will be using it with whom?
 - The dashboard needs to be user-friendly for young people, maybe developed into an online tool
 - Important is to not only focus on production and on rural youth
 - Take the socio-cultural context into consideration to make the tool less technical (e.g. including a box for additional/local issues as safety, environmental conditions and add soft/hard skills and not only (formal) education). Separate policy from resources, and make it more personal and adaptive to the context so it becomes specific when applied
 - The dashboard will be tested in East and West Africa in 2016 by the [AgriProFocus youth programme](#) and [Fair and Sustainable Advisory Services](#)
5. *“Applying international network approaches”* by Inger Janssen (AgriProFocus):
- Discussed questions: 1) Which activities will have most impact? What should we (as a network) focus on? 2) How does the network reach the more difficult to reach groups?
 - It was confirmed that the work on improving the image of agribusiness for young people is essential. The network can showcase inspirational examples of young agripreneurs. It has the opportunity to reach youth especially through the means of the online platform as young people are more technology literate
 - It was advised that AgriProFocus has to work on pro-actively promoting the online platform through connecting with other youth networks and youth organisations
 - In addition to that, the network partners are encouraged to keep on organising targeted activities that appeal to young people, such as business competitions and webinar discussions
6. *“Young entrepreneurs in agribusiness and access to finance: an education project to involve youth at school level”* by Elly Janssen ([Day for Change](#)).
- Day for Change activities seem to have potential to attract young people worldwide for to the agricultural sector. The knowledge and experience from Day for Change in the Netherlands can come in handy
 - It is important that the education project gets a more sustainable character, and that more attention is paid to follow-ups and result & impact measurement, to see what is the actual effect of the project on youth when they grow up and start working
 - The project should have a context-specific set-up
 - In the few months new opportunities will be explored. Suggestions and ideas are [welcome!](#)

Reflection

After the World Café the facilitator Femke asked the two keynote speakers José Carlos and Klarien, Ken Lohento ([Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation, CTA](#)) and Aaltje de Roos ([Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#)) to reflect on the key questions of the seminar. José Carlos mentioned: **“Not everybody needs to be a farmer; the people who have a passion in farming should be supported”**. Klarien added: **“A narrow focus on youth limits the possibility for a wider discussion on how to change agriculture, so we also**



need to talk (holistically) about how to use our soil and how to produce with respect for the environment”. She also noted that youth prefers networking and clustering over following a leader. Aaltje de Roos enjoyed the discussions and presentations. The Ministry is increasingly paying attention to youth issues. She therefore expressed the hope that more events will be organised that help to raise the voices of young farmers: **“Farmers would say: I want to earn a decent living, and we have to modernize and mechanize. Young farmers want to be part of a lively and profitable agricultural sector. How to change the image of farming?”** Ken Lohento mentioned that this seminar addressed the key areas in which CTA works. CTA believes that **“a specific youth in agriculture policy should be developed”** and is interested in incubation to improve the capacity and network of young entrepreneurs in agriculture. Ken also pointed out that **“people often say that agriculture needs to become sexy again, but that agriculture is dirty and if you cannot accept that, you should not be in agriculture”**. In his opinion **“ICT can help to create a better image for farming”**.

Finally, all seminar participants thought of a concrete action they could take within the next six months. During the lunch there was a possibility to continue the network conversation.

Learnings and follow-ups



In future events more time will be allocated to presenting background information about the topic, following from (academic) research and field experience (also on the various youth categories). Also, more time will be reserved for plenary discussions and World Café sessions as these were highly valued by the seminar participants. Hopefully, in this way, even more young people actually involved in agriculture and agribusiness (services) will be interested to attend to share their stories and experiences.

A large number of the participants indicated a need for a Community of Practice around this topic. Please find a list with all participants (from a broad variety of organisations working worldwide) in the annex, including contact information. Everyone is encouraged to become part of the networks of AgriProFocus and YPARD through their websites.

A short video about the seminar will be shared soon with you via e-mail, and via the organisers’ social media accounts.

On January 20th, CDI will again organise a seminar about this topic as part of another short course on ‘Market Access for Food Security’. For more information, please contact [Anja Wolsky](#) and [Yeray Saavedra Gonzalez](#).

Other resources

[Blog by Arrigo Osti, Jan van ’t Land, Daniel Magwegwe, Anna Peereboom, Julia van Oord, Théau Dusart, November 2015 on the website of AgriProFocus](#)

[Blog by Machteld Schoonenberg and Ingrid Flink soon online on special YPARD blog area](#)

[Blog by Marleen Brouwer \(CDI\), March 23rd 2015 on the website of INCLUDE Platform](#)