



Response to the 2017 External Review

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YPARD Response to the External Review

YPARD thanks the authors of *“Young Professionals’ for Agricultural Development (YPARD) External review 2017 – looking forward by looking back”* for their detailed work and report. The following text reflects the feedback provided by the national chapters and the global coordination unit on the external review. We reflect on those components which resonate with us as well as those areas which we feel require additional effort on our side and will require a concerted effort to address during the next strategic phase of YPARD.

The review was shared widely with the network and specific areas were sent to the national chapters for their response. The template for responses is included in Annex 1. Detailed responses were received from 15 chapters, with at least one response from all four regions. The recommendations of the review and feedback from members will be key documentation for the upcoming strategic development planning meeting.

Language.

The external review says: Is it really the case that communication in other languages would contribute to members’ ownership? This has to be further explored as well as the assumption that broadening language communication could increase membership

Many national representatives responded that having more resources in their native languages would be beneficial. The reasons cited include that it would lead to: 1. Increased awareness about YPARD activities and opportunities, 2. Better understanding the information offered by YPARD, 3. Enhanced culture of national chapters and 4. Stronger connection to farmers and other rural youth who have limited knowledge of, or do not speak English.

Responses varied from those countries where English is not in common usage, such as Peru where they felt that more local language materials would enhance activities significantly to Nigeria where they felt that more local language materials would have limited impact. Nepal indicated that they did trial translating YPARD pamphlets into Nepalese but that this did not result in any significant increase in members. The Swedish National Representative indicated that since they have a strong link already with a national organization that disseminates material in Swedish (SIANI) that they were able to share local language materials through existing connections.

The GCU may have a role in supporting and enabling national chapters to make stronger linkages with national institutes that have relevant local language material. For YPARD discussions and ensuring everyone is part of the conversation, YPARD should explore how best to include individuals. A range of voluntary translation, online translation tools and other means can be explored to enhance community engagement.

We recognize that with the existing focus on opportunities in English, this benefits some communities disproportionately, over others. National chapters are encouraged to share information at national level and national Facebook groups have been developed for this purpose. Knowledge exchange remains a priority and YPARD will continue to work to see how we can reasonably reach the largest number of members, regardless of language.

More young farmers

The external review says: The inclusion of a broader diversity of stakeholders continues to be untapped. In China for example, a close link has been created with a large farmers' network, but this potential is not fully explored in other areas in the world.

Responses from the national representatives were mixed on the topic of increasing more young farmers to the network. While all believe that young farmers should be part of the network many felt that there was already a significant involvement of young farmers from YPARD Peru's work who co-organised the first national young farmers meeting in their country with others such as YPARD Hungary who maintains close relationships with national young farmer networks. YPARD France indicates that in their country, young farmer organisations already have recognition and legitimacy and it would not make sense for YPARD to replicate those efforts, but they and YPARD Italy recognize the scope for enhanced relationships with national young farmer organisations.

Several respondents voiced that since YPARD is a broad based organization with young people from a range of different backgrounds, no one area should have a focus, but there should be a balance of diverse areas of expertise.

If the network does want to expand its reach to more young farmers, some suggestions from YPARD Nepal include working with undergraduate students to reach out and engage with farmers. Some felt that the information and interactions provided by the network are not extremely relevant for young farmers which is why they do not participate as actively. They felt that YPARD could promote its value to young farmer groups and explore with them how to make the network more attractive to young farmers. Additional suggestions include further developing the sub-regional capacities or different nodes of national chapters to bring them closer to the local level where ties are more effectively made with farmers rather than through at the regional or international level.

The feedback demonstrates that the situation regarding farmer involvement and potential for increase is different in each country chapter. However, all country chapters supported continued or stronger engagement with existing young farmer organisations, working with them rather than duplicating their efforts. The Global Coordination Unit (GCU) also notes that while registered member statistics show farmers as only accounting for 6.3% of the network, we know that some farmers that are involved in on the ground activities but not registered. Further efforts must be made to consolidate offline information.

Working across regions

The external review says: The interregional linkages have not been analyzed in detail and the interviews showed that some regional coordinators work more closely together than others.

The majority of national representatives do not work across regions although most expressed an interest in exploring this further. Most respondents recognized the additional learning that could be garnered through inter-regional partnerships.

Regions are encouraged to work together and learn from one another as much as is feasibly possible within their work and there was recognition that online exchanges do occur, but that these could be made more regular. The most effective method of building these relationships was identified to be

through face to face meetings, and exchanges. There was a recognition that this would require fund investment for travel and additional time investment from the national teams.

Policy Debates

The external review says: Members being in the driving seat is particularly important for policy dialogue. The whole network can be excelled in its policy role and voice. Overall, the review made clear that more can be done. However, the extent to which members consider this as a priority area needs to be further unraveled, assessed and discussed. Is it possible to have a voice at global level? If so, how? Or rather strengthen voices at the regional level? Is there any space on certain topics to engage for common action? What can be expected (for whom, where and when) by participating in the policy dialogue? All these questions need to be addressed in a participatory-manner with the constituencies.

Many of the national representatives indicated that they feel that engagement in policy debates is important, although none had questioned their members on the topic and could not speak on their behalf. Based on the responses provided, it was clear policy engagement is a different story for each respondent, with some indicating that it was a very politically sensitive subject and had to be treated with the utmost care.

Engagement in policy debates is a broad area, and thus subject to various types of interpretation. YPARD does not generally have the opportunity to convene policy debates and thus inputs tend to be ad-hoc and opportunity based. The Armenia and France representative cautioned that we first should have a clear vision on what we want to achieve before making this a strategic priority.

Others questioned how neutral the platform should be and whose views will be those one's put forward YPARD itself has planned to look at what representation means in a diverse body. The review heavily emphasizes policy, but at the same time there is little evidence that policy engagement is member-driven. There is a feeling that this push by respondents has come more from partners than members. This aspect must be further examined in the context of whether YPARD is solely a member driven network.

Diversity versus focus

The external review says: The diversity of members seems to be very relevant and powerful in the current global affairs regarding agricultural development and should continue to be encouraged. However, with a small team of support staff, the diverse needs of 15,000 members cannot all be met. The broad range of members also makes deciding where to focus attention, a challenge. The risk of continuing to grow whilst sustaining a certain focus of the network and the ability to respond to members' needs, is already of concern. Expectations among members regarding this point are also broad and vary from those who consider that the network should continue to grow, to those who think the network is becoming too large and puts its capacity to focus on measurable and meaningful impacts at stake. Should the network continue to grow worldwide? If so, how? Or rather, should it favour growth where the network has been more needed?

The majority of respondents indicated that the network should continue to grow. Some did indicate that the emphasis should be placed on recruiting active members and exploring how best to recruit and maintain enthusiasm among that demographic. Others indicated there was no need to increase numbers, but rather to expand to underrepresented countries.

Many felt that instead of being too broad, the network was instead diverse, which was considered positive.

Some indicated that numbers were irrelevant, that it should instead focus on better serving existing members and ensuring the objectives are being met. This is also a question of expectations from members of the network. Even with a network of 2000 people, individual attention and meeting an individual's idea of what the network should be would be impossible. YPARD should examine what type of expectations are held by its members and how to manage those expectations realistically, not over-promise and provide a voice for those who want to change things and a platform for those who want to be engaged.

Support the member driven approach

The external review says: YPARD demonstrates a strong presence as a self-organized community of young people. Continued development as an autonomous movement revolves around the fact that members are in the driving seat. What members need, want and prioritize should be the starting point. This goes further than the mere exchange of information and knowledge. Proper consultation activities with the members need to be organized in order to attend to this recommendation.

Most members, with some caveats, agree with the member driven approach. While members should have strong inputs, there should be an existing strategic direction guiding the process. It was recognized that members have their own schedules and are not always available to provide input and feedback to the network. Thus, key decisions may not be able to hinge on timely or specific member input.

It was agreed that feedback on key documents (such as the external review) is one method of ensuring good feedback and engagement. However it was noted that more opportunities for face to face interaction would be a good way of strengthening ties and engagement. The suggestion of more frequent meetings or a general assembly were welcomed.

The GCU recognizes that proper consultation with member is required. This will form the basis of the strategic development plan and noted as the key driving force with our members. However, YPARD must look at balancing member driven actions with what partners need and how the sector operates. How can YPARD influence an agenda, which may not be a primary need of its members? YPARD must closely examine how to best balance member and organizational needs?

Additional notes of recognition from the review

- More resourcing for the network is important and should be a key area of discussion and focus with national chapters.
- The review rightly highlighted YPARD's strong communications outreach. YPARD will continue to use this platform as a means to share information, aspirations, ideas and strong stories of youth in agriculture.
- The scope and potential of the network through the connectivity potential diagram provides a valuable picture of how large the prospective network is and the extent of its reach.
- Measuring impact and effectiveness is an area that requires continued attention.
- Maintaining quality with limited staff and an increasing member base remains challenging.

**Annex 1: Questionnaires sent to national working groups for feedback on the
YPARD External Review 2017**

Dear national working groups:

The YPARD [2017 External Review](#) was recently received from the external reviewers at KIT. We must now prepare a response to this review, with information from yourselves on what you thought about it, whether the insights and recommendations ring true or whether there are some areas that you don't quite agree with. Based upon the understanding by the reviewers of the network and its challenges and opportunities they developed a series of recommendations. These recommendations will contribute to shaping the strategic plan and thus it is important that you confirm whether the identified challenges, opportunities and recommendations reflect your experiences as an active part of the network and your aspirations for the network moving forward.

The response to the external review is the first stage of the strategic plan development and thus your input now contributes towards shaping the way forward. Your answers will be collated into a report alongside responses from the regional representatives, global coordination unit and steering committee members. The next steps will then be the broad consultation process among YPARD members in the development of the new strategic plan. We will reach out to you again at this time for your feedback.

Below, we have extracted a few areas of focus for your feedback. If you have read the complete review you are also welcome to make any additional comments. You may choose to consult with national working groups and members for responses if you feel it would provide additional insight.

Language.

The external review says: Is it really the case that communication in other languages would contribute to members' ownership? This has to be further explored as well as the assumption that broadening language communication could increase membership

Our question for you:

1. What would be the impact of having more resources in your native language?

More young farmers

The external review says: The inclusion of a broader diversity of stakeholders continues to be untapped. In China for example, a close link has been created with a large farmers' network, but this potential is not fully explored in other areas in the world.

Our questions for you:

1. Do you feel that there is a low level of focus and involvement of young farmers in the network overall? In your own country?

2. Does YPARD need to make more effort to reach out to young farmers?
3. If yes, do you have suggestions on how to better reach out to young farmers in your country?

Working across regions

The external review says: The interregional linkages have not been analyzed in detail and the interviews showed that some regional coordinators work more closely together than others.

Our questions for you:

4. Do you work across regions? If not, is this something that you would like to do more of?
5. How do you think you can work more closely across regions and how YPARD can facilitate this? What types of activities would you like to do with other regions?

Policy dialogue

The external review says: Members being in the driving seat is particularly important for policy dialogue. The whole network can be excelled in its policy role and voice. Overall, the review made clear that more can be done. However, the extent to which members consider this as a priority area needs to be further unraveled, assessed and discussed. Is it possible to have a voice at global level? If so, how? Or rather strengthen voices at the regional level? Is there any space on certain topics to engage for common action? What can be expected (for whom, where and when) by participating in the policy dialogue? All these questions need to be addressed in a participatory-manner with the constituencies.

Our questions for you:

6. Should YPARD be prioritizing more youth engagement in policy dialogues?
7. Do YPARD members in your country want to engage in policy dialogues?

Diversity versus focus

The external review says: The diversity of members seems to be very relevant and powerful in the current global affairs regarding agricultural development and should continue to be encouraged. However, with a small team of support staff, the diverse needs of 15,000 members cannot all be met. The broad range of members also makes deciding where to focus attention, a challenge. The risk of continuing to grow whilst sustaining a certain focus of the network and the ability to respond to members' needs, is already of concern. Expectations among members regarding this point are also broad and vary from those who consider that the network should continue to grow, to those who think the network is becoming too large and puts its capacity to focus on measurable and meaningful impacts at stake. Should the network continue to grow worldwide? If so, how? Or rather, should it favour growth where the network has been more needed?

Our questions for you:

1. Should YPARD continue to focus on growing the number of members around the world? Please explain your answer.
2. Do you feel that the current network is too broad with not enough focus?
3. If so, how do you propose this is addressed?

Support the member driven approach

The external review says: YPARD demonstrates a strong presence as a self-organized community of young people. Continued development as an autonomous movement revolves around the fact that members are in the driving seat. What members need, want and prioritize should be the starting point. This goes further than the mere exchange of information and knowledge. Proper consultation activities with the members need to be organized in order to attend to this recommendation.

Our questions for you:

1. Do you agree with the member driven approach? Why or why not?
2. What changes do we need to make this happen?

Any other input

Was there anything else mentioned in the report that you strongly agree with or disagree with?

Was anything missed?

Thank you for your thoughtfulness and time to respond to the external review. We will soon share a draft response with you based on the feedback from all country working groups.