

# Young People, Farming & Food Conference

19<sup>th</sup> - 21<sup>st</sup> March 2012  
Accra, Ghana



Conference Newsletter #1 / Monday 19 March 2012



## Agriculture & youth: a problem of attraction?

The conference began with a lively session. A few minutes after 9am, with the panel and delegates settled, **Sam Asuming-Brepong** gave a warm welcome to Ghana, the panel and an introduction to the University of Ghana, ISSER and FAC. Why talk about young people, farming and food? With increasing interest in the young, and the search for appropriate responses to involve them in agriculture, there is a lack of analysis, research and policy working on the topic.

This conference will mark a period of high-quality policy research and interaction, he emphasised, surrounding the youth in agriculture and the agrifood sector. Participants were invited to share and discuss their insights into the young people of Africa in agriculture.

In the first plenary session, an expert panel discussed problems facing African agriculture - growing populations, job losses and nutrition - as well as some of the various solutions being attempted.

Increasing productivity is vital to address the problems of hunger and unemployment, according to **Samuel Kojo Dapaah** (Ministry of Food and Agriculture, Ghana). He cited statistics on hunger (239 million were classed as "hungry" in Africa in 2010) and youth unemployment (people aged 14 to 24 are 60% of African population, and about 60% of them are unemployed). We need to create, he argued, a strong link between food production and the other bits of the value chain - for example, food processing, packaging and marketing. **Ramatu Al-Hassan** (University of Ghana) reminded us to look at the dynamics surrounding agriculture and

young people: the rise of urbanisation, mechanisation, food safety standards and climate change. Motivation, encouragement, guidance and training are needed to harness the optimism felt by some young people about a career in agriculture.

Financial confidence and investment was also needed – a point echoed by **Namanga Ngongi** (AGRA). He described under-investment in young people as a waste of human resources and talent. But, he said, there is a "great and palpable momentum towards agriculture in Africa". He explained AGRA's role in encouraging investment and financial confidence. Better school provision and access to land and finance are needed – but not as much as the creation of a sense of pride.

**"Subsistence agriculture was invented in 7000BC – it's not what young people are looking for today." Samuel Kojo Dapaah**

After coffee, a presentation from **Ben White** (ISS) challenged some common framings of youth. Seeing them as "human capital" or "in transition" is at odds with how young people see themselves: in the here and now. Governments try to deal with unemployment by promoting entrepreneurial skills, but the problem is structural. Policies have led to the deskilling of rural youth and rural life, underinvestment in infrastructures and lack of access to land.

In some rural communities, Dr White explained, older people hang onto land instead of passing it to the next generation – or even worse, it is sold without consulting them. Reactions such as sabotage or political unrest demonstrate the distress caused. Some major changes need to happen to these structures before many young people see agriculture as a positive career choice.

## Press conference

Ten journalists from across Africa gathered to hear remarks and answers to questions from **Sam Asuming-Brepong**, **Samuel Kojo Dapaah** and **Namanga Ngongi** at the press conference held during the first morning tea break. The journalists included two supported by AGRA from Nigeria and Kenya; the two FAC/ISSER media competition winners, also from Kenya; and several local

journalists from Ghanaian print and radio media houses. The first coverage of the opening session and press conference can be seen at <http://bit.ly/facnews1>

Further links to media coverage will be provided on the FAC conference website, along with video clips and blog pieces of the panel sessions written by various delegates.

## Panel 1: Aspirations and Attitudes

In this session, **Richard Ampadu** talked about research on young people's attitudes to farming in rural Ghana, **Yisak Tafere** presented a study on aspirations in Ethiopia, and **Nana Akua Anyidoho** talked about young people's views on careers in Ghana's cocoa sector. Some key points were: (1) Young people's aspirations towards the agri-food sector are as varied as young people themselves. It's crucial that policy-makers recognise and reflect this – only by understanding people's diverse realities is there any hope that policy will reach its intended targets. (2) There appears to be a widespread stigma to working in farming, akin to the stigma of poverty: in relation to smallholder farming these are far too often one and the same thing. (3) How can the agri-food sector provide the kinds of lifestyles in rural areas that attract people to urban areas? Not just in smallholder farming but in off-farm agriculture, in post-production points of the value chain.

## Panel 2: Education and training

This very interesting and engaging panel focused on the role of education and training in producing future agriculturalists throughout the entire value chain. Three panellists shared their experiences on how the education system can improve participation of young people in agricultural activities. **Lamin Jobe's** (CORAF) presentation focused on graduate employment and whether they have the right skill sets to meet market demand. The presentation highlighted the urgency for change in agricultural education and the need to equip trainees with skills needed to increase agricultural productivity. He also called for strong linkages, networking and learning between civil society employers, agribusiness/private sector, farmer organisations, amongst others. Such linkages, he argues will enable students to access practical attachments and internships at enterprises thus making agricultural training more responsive to the changing job market. **Grace Mwaura's** (Oxford University) presentation delved further into ways of not only enticing, but engaging young people in agriculture through training and mentorship. Grace's case study was on the Healthy Learning Programme in Kenya, which is providing education and mentorship for children to get them interested in agriculture from a young age. Young people have different skills that they can bring to agriculture and not just at production level. Young people offer varied skills to meet the demand along the value chain. The final presentation from **Courtney Paisley** (YPARD) brought experiences on what young



people are looking for in terms of training to participate in agricultural development. She concluded that more emphasis on agricultural entrepreneurship and soft skills is needed as well as greater information sharing between networks.

*“Young people provide new ways of thinking and enable us to question our current methods.” Courtney Paisley*

## Panel 3: Livelihoods (1)

This session began with **Getnet Tadele** providing an overview of youth, education and farming in two areas of Ethiopia. The overriding response of the focus group discussions across different age groups, including the parents of school children, was that agriculture was a last resort and often not an option at all. Agriculture was perceived particularly negatively by girls. The youth consider agriculture as a degraded profession and not enough is being done to challenge this misguided attitude. **Christine Okali** presented an interesting longitudinal micro-study from Brong Afafo, Ghana on young people in tomato production. Perhaps unusually, young men were enthusiastically and dynamically involved in this business. Why? The crop gave immediate capital to build a house or educate their children. In the final paper, **Mandlenkosi Sibanda** provided an overview of impact of racial relations (often excluded from research analyses) in the fast track land reform in Zimbabwe in 2000-2. Interestingly, young white farmers do not view the policy as racist, and healthy race relations exist between young white and black farmers who are forming alliances and negotiating inter-racial private land deals. The challenge, concluded Douglas, is to re-think agricultural policy to be youth-centred, racially inclusive and responsive to new governance challenges.

## Tweet of the day

**@Robinstratas** #Africa has yet to recognize the treasure they have in their #youth and strategize how to tap into this profuse resource #ypff2012

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## Photos of the conference

Visit [www.flickr.com/photos/futureagricultures](http://www.flickr.com/photos/futureagricultures) to see photos from all the sessions.