



Management response to the 2013 YPARD External Review

YPARD Steering Committee and Global Coordination Unit
Young Professionals for Agricultural Development

YPARD has been reviewed at four years intervals, following its inception in 2006, at the request of our donors and partners. The first review played a significant role in renewing our relationships with our donors and partners, sharpening our strategies while setting new objectives, as well as setting the agenda for organizational change.

The 2013 review was undertaken by a team of external consultants composed of Lisa Cespedes and Wim Andriesse, selected by the Steering Committee. The external review process spanned August to November 2013, and the Final Report was approved by the Steering Committee (SC) in January 2014. We appreciate the hard and detailed work of the review team and welcome their thorough analyses and constructive recommendations for a renewed YPARD.

In particular, we appreciate that the External Review Final Report contains six main recommendations drawn directly from the review process that, coupled with the particular recommendations made by the Review Team, would positively contribute to the activity of YPARD after their implementation. The conclusions and recommendations are divided, in the opinion of the SC, into one overarching recommendation and a set of secondary recommendations. The conclusions and recommendations have been interpreted constructively by the Steering Committee and should be construed positively by YPARD's donors, partners and stakeholders in its field.

Taking everything into consideration, the SC considers that the set of recommendations presented in the external review report is designed to bring YPARD the in-depth change required to fulfill its niche as the "voice of youth in agricultural development". This is a crucial role which YPARD is fully prepared to undertake.

The review team's assessment regarding YPARD's achievements in the 2009-2013 period clearly indicates the high performance of the Global Coordination Unit since the recruitment of a new Director in April 2010 and of Web & Communications Officer in March 2011. These dates also earmark an extensive growth of the YPARD network, both in terms of membership and regional representation, but also in terms of activities at regional and national levels.

From the report, we can see that between 2009 and 2013, YPARD has grown, in terms of membership, by over 400%. YPARD maintains a percentage of 10% membership among senior professionals over 40 years old, showing that senior professionals are interested in championing youth activities. This is not just the ageing of existing members, as 175 persons over 40 years old registered in 2013.

Concerning YPARD`s communications efforts, as former members stated, one of the biggest challenges was in establishing a functional website that could provide useful information to members and engage them. The 2013 Report mentions that the website and the social media accounts are now one of YPARD`s primary tools of promotions, the online reach covering over 214 countries/territories in December 2013.

In the opinion of the Steering Committee, the overarching goal¹ that the review highlights in YPARD`s future activity is:

*To develop and apply a
content-driven approach*

The Steering Committee, together with the Global Coordination Unit, agrees that the 2014-2018 period must focus on enhancing its niche role as the “*Voice of Young Professionals in Agricultural Development*”, by facilitating the development of topic specific activities and ensuring that regional and national content are represented. It is of importance of maintaining YPARD`s objectiveness by becoming the facilitator of discussions and the aggregator of view points, while also keeping YPARD as a platform, thus using our networking dimension to ease young professionals` access to policy debates.

The Steering Committee sees the move towards a content-driven agenda as YPARD`s main objective for the 2014-2018 period, being ready to be involved as leaders or facilitators of working groups on specific themes, this being also a measure for increasing the interaction between the Steering Committee and YPARD members.

These measures have to be taken, while keeping in mind current capacity restrictions of YPARD, such as funding sources and regional level capacities.

Timeline: The YPARD Business Plan will be renewed by March 2014 taking the conclusions and recommendations into consideration and will be shared with our donors, partners and other interested stakeholders.

¹ In this management response, references are made to the recommendations made in Chapter 7 of the External Review Final Report.

The set of secondary recommendations of the review regard:

- Stakeholder representation;
- Mentoring Program: Implementation of Mentoring Approaches;
- YPARD Funding;
- YPARD`s Management structure and organization;
- Budgetary implications.

1. Stakeholder representation – The Steering Committee recognizes the fact that the current stakeholder structure, as presented in the 2013 Report, is oriented towards the research sector, having 36% of its members from research institutes or universities. When YPARD was developed it initially made the strongest headway with young scientists, but as it matured, it has been able to reach out to more diverse stakeholder groups, in order to ensure representation of all young professionals directly or indirectly linked to agricultural development. The mentioned statistics in the review only reflect online registered members and do not include offline members that have registered through Country Representatives, that may come from other stakeholder groups such as smallholder farmers and may not have access to the technology and internet connection to register and participate in online activities.

We consider that the gender balance (30% female, 70% male), while still male dominated, mirrors much of the agricultural development sector. YPARD strives for a better representation of women in its membership and its activities. Currently, women represent over 60% of YPARD`s overall management structure (global, regional and national level).

2. Mentoring Program: Implementation of Mentoring Approaches – As observed by the review, YPARD implemented a survey in 2012 where over 90% of YPARD`s members stated they were interested in joining a mentoring programme.

The development and implementation of a Mentoring Program has been a concern of YPARD for the past two years. YPARD has done a baseline study in order to assess the needs of its members. A pilot-peer to peer mentoring programme indicated that the preferred approach was that of a traditional mentor – mentee relation that YPARD could facilitate. Presently, YPARD is searching for funding in order to implement the mentoring program in the next planning phase (2014-2018).

3. YPARD Funding – YPARD`s current financial support comes from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation in the amount of 150,000 USD per year and from

Netherlands` Directorate General for International Cooperation in the amount of 70,000 USD per year, as part of the support offered to the Global Forum for Agricultural Research (GFAR).

The diversification of funding sources has been a main concern for both the Global Coordination Unit and the Steering Committee. In January 2014 it was decided that a (part time) fundraising consultant should be recruited. The challenge that YPARD has is a lack of legal status which means that it must apply for funding as FAO, which may be a disadvantage at times. can be partly overcome, in our opinion and according to the recommendations of the Report, by participating in fundraising together with legally established partners, thus allowing us to apply for call for proposals from recognized donors such as the European Union, IFAD, CIDA and others.

Other opportunities that the Steering Committee has agreed to explore are related to the active participation of its members in networking activities related to fundraising, by either building relationships with new donors at different events or by directly engaging donor organizations and participating in writing project proposals. YPARD is also seeking to develop the capacity of national representatives to develop their fundraising skills.

4. YPARD`s Management structure and organization – Three important conclusions can be seen in the Report:

- The Global Coordination Unit needs to be reinforced through at least an additional full time position in order to support the activity of a platform that grew with over 400% between 2009 and 2013 in terms of membership, and that has now a set objective to reorient itself towards a content-driven agenda;
- The hosting agreements for some Regional Coordination Units need to be renegotiated as the demands have grown at regional level. the time allocated by the Regional Coordinators (from 20% to 25%) according to the signed agreements; is in some cases insufficient to coordinate YPARD activities at regional and national level, and to provide adequate feedback to the Global Coordination Unit;
- At national level, there is a need for a standardization of management and organizational structures, as activities sometimes seem chaotic. A key recommendation is that hosting institutions should be sought for national representatives too, similar to those at regional level.

Management's response:

- We acknowledge the hard work and performance that the Global Coordination unit has done in the past years. We agree that there is a stringent need, if resources are available, to strengthen the Global Coordination Unit with at least one full time position to support YPARD in capacity development and fundraising activities. Until resources become available for such a position, the Steering Committee considers that possible solutions to reduce the pressure on the Global Coordination Unit are the use of interns for specific task such as social media, content development, facilitating e-discussions etc., and the use of a bottom up approach in terms of communications, that would allow national and regional representative to create and feed content into YPARD's main communication channels.
- It has been agreed that a renegotiation of some of the terms in regional hosting agreements is necessary in the next period. The Steering Committee considers that an option for strengthening the Regional Coordination Units is by having, if possible through the new hosting agreements, interns that could aid the Regional Coordinators in their activities.
- The Steering Committee, together with the Global Coordination Unit, considers that the option of having national level hosting agreements is not feasible at this time, as it will only burden the activity of the Global and Regional Coordination Unit/s by having to deal with administrative rules of the national hosting institutions and with communication on certain matters with these. Instead, we consider that a better option is to build sub-regional Coordination Units that could be an advantage at global, regional and national level, both in terms of representativeness, communications and increased participation in sub-regional activities. Currently, such units are proposed for West Africa and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) regions.
- Additionally, the Steering Committee has agreed that in 2014 a performance review system for all management structures will be implemented.

- 5. Budgetary implications** – All conclusions and recommendations made by the Report and recognized by the Steering Committee and the Global Coordination Unit lead to the conclusion that YPARD needs to supplement its current budget in order to be able to support its continuous and powerful growth and shift towards a content driven agenda. Although, by formalizing the new hosting agreements and by creating thematic working groups that could be led either by Steering Committee members or experts on specific

topics, there will be a slight reduction in the tasks of the Global Coordination Unit, but the management of these actors is also required. Changes in the YPARD Charter have already been made to reflect the new roles and responsibilities of the different team members of YPARD, as well as how increased demands and needs could be met.

Other observations:

It has been recommended by the Report that a collaborative social media team should be developed and supported by YPARD's Management in order to increase our efficiency on different communication channels. At this time, YPARD has developed, a strong collaborative team which, with the support of the CGIAR Consortium, has participated in several global and regional conferences and events. In order to provide effective information services to our members, we are currently exploring providing more content in different languages and enhancing communications from local to global level, in order to tailor the content received by YPARD members.

In order to better reflect its drive towards being a multi-stakeholder platform that represents the *"Voice of Young Professionals in Agricultural Development"*, YPARD is currently going through a rebranding process that will help us to position ourselves better among global stakeholders.