Desk review of successful mentoring programmes- related to Agriculture and Research for development (ARD)

Young Professionals' Platform on Agricultural Research for Development (YPARD)

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SUMMARY

The support to Agricultural Research for Development (ARD) required in this century requires us to use new ways and models to attract the young generation.

Mentoring contributes to the development of young professionals by providing them support, expertise and networking opportunities. YPARD is examining ways to build the capacity of young professionals through mentoring processes. While traditional mentoring processes focus on the benefits derived by junior mentees, of the experience of the senior mentor, YPARD is looking to promote a two-way mentoring process, which benefits both parties. YPARD wants to emphasize the benefits that the senior mentor gains from the junior mentee, which include new and fresh ideas on their work, new tools, technologies, and a link to the wider YPARD network, through the active participation of the mentee. It also explores the role that peer to peer mentoring can play in filling this need. This report forms part of the work to examine existing mentoring systems, learning from and collaborating with other mentoring programmes in Agricultural Research for Development (ARD). Recommendation from this desk review, interviews and focus group discussions form the basis of the YPARD mentoring programme structure.

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BACKGROUND

Chapter 14 of the Agenda 21, on Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development (SARD) states that by the year 2025, 83% of the expected global population of 8.5 billion will be living in the developing counties. Yet the capacity of available resources (including human resource) and technologies to satisfy the demands of this growing population for food and other agriculture commodities remains uncertain (UNCSD, 1992). The challenges of meeting future food demand, developing vibrant rural centers and promoting broad-based economic growth in developing countries depend on the world's young generation. According to IFAD, the world's future farmers, entrepreneurs, and leaders are the young people living in rural areas. There is thus need to prepare this generation, and place them at the forefront of global strategies for food security, rural development, and income growth. Not only to contribute to development, but young people need to see the potential in agriculture for employment creation, better careers and income generating decent jobs (IFAD, 2011) (CTA, 2002).

Young people according to the United Nations are persons between the age of 15 and 24 years while YPARD includes youth as those under 40 years of age to reflect the age when many young people begin their careers in ARD, which is traditionally later than many other fields. Youth according to the UN definition in developing countries account for 19% of the population, while those below 15 years account for a further 30%, which provides for a young population in the next two decades (UNDESA, 2009). However, YPARD has a much

Youth employment challenges are linked, among other things, to quality of education and a general lack of opportunities. According to the International Labour Organization, of the 620 Million these economically active 15-24 year olds, 88.2 million youth are unemployed globally (ILO, 2006). About a third of the youth between 15-24 years suffer from deficit of decent work opportunities. The vast majority of jobs available to youth are low paid, insecure, and with few benefits of prospects for advancement (UNDP-Spain MDGF, 2007).

While some developing countries have included youth employment in their Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, much remains to be done to train youth with the skills that match labor market demands (UN, 2010). These unemployment rates contradict the literacy and access to education, which is a major avenue to prepare a population for employment. It also contradicts with the anticipated increase in employment through the agricultural sector as a driver for development in most developing countries. Over 70% of the youth population in Sub Saharan Africa and South Asia live in the rural areas who are poor, out of school, and lacking employment opportunities (Zuehlke, 2009). Half of this population contributes to a semi skilled and unskilled agriculture-sector labor force (FAO ILO, 2011).

It is against this background, that the 2011 Governing Council of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) has highlighted that youth, as the future in agricultural and rural development, and will need to be better equipped for the future (IFAD, 2011). The African Union acknowledges the need to provide resources, capacity building, and opportunities for the active engagement of the young people in the continents' development (AU, 2006). During an ACP countries' youth meeting organized by the ARDYIS[i] through the CTA[ii], and which three YPARD members took part, recommendations were made to the government, to support youth involvement in agriculture and ICT[iii] including: policy support in agricultural studies; research and educational incentives; capacity building; financial aid; ICT proliferation; law; gender and marginalized youth (CTA, 2011). Further, Article 15, 4 (f) of the African Youth Charter on 'Sustainable Livelihoods and Youth Employment, states the needs to provide training, mentorship and market opportunities to promote youth entrepreneurship (AU, 2006).For meaningful impact by youth in any development, there is need to invest in their human capital (UNECA, 2011). Their contribution to development

should be valued, measured and developed; this is possible through skills development, training and mentoring. Mentoring is one of the ways in which human capital is enhanced to support future successful planning and development (Esty-Ibarra, 2004). Capacity development of the young people, to ensure their involvement in decision-making on development is also important. Youth programmes and platforms have successfully allowed the fruitful contribution of youth in development issues. One such is the Young Professionals' Platform on Agricultural Research for Development (YPARD) launched in 2006, which promotes agriculture among young people and supports them by broadening their opportunities to participate in strategic ARD events, facilitating access to resources, and facilitating exchange of information and knowledge across different agricultural disciplines (YPARD, 2010). One major challenge, which YPARD aims at addressing through its membership, is the unlocking and inspiring the potential for knowledge and skills development in ARD among the young professionals. Such a potential can be unlocked through a *mentoring programme*, which develops the human capital in young professionals to contribute to ARD and gain skilled and fulfilling employment in the same sector.

Mentoring focuses on the individual (mentee), on their present needs and potential, and thus prepares them for leadership in ARD. It has a long history with its roots stretching back to the 8th century B.C. where it got its name from the elderly friend and counsellor of Odysseus, named Mentor, who also offered guidance and acted as tutor to Odysseus' son Telemachus (Mason, 2011). It encompasses *coaching*[iv], making it unique and adding value" to career growth and leadership skills of any individual. Organizations, learning institutions, and businesses have continuously relied on mentoring to advance the capacity of their employee, invest in new inexperienced staff, prepare staff for promotion, and even more importantly prepare young professionals for employment/business. In leadership, people aspiring to be leaders have sought mentors, in the leadership circle that they walk with through to acquire soft skills, and learn from their experiences, they have often worked as their aides. Research institutions have relied on mentoring and coaching to enable young inexperienced researchers gain skills, and experience on research work, writing, and publishing.

This report seeks to provide a review of some of the selected mentoring programmes, and thereby form a basis for guiding on the structures and key principles of a YPARD mentoring programme. The review is based on the general aim of the mentoring programme, and how the YPARD programme can learn from best practices of existing mentoring programmes. The report concludes with recommendations for the YPARD mentoring programme and what niche it would fit in.

THE AFRICAN WOMEN IN AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT (AWARD) PROGRAMME

The AWARD mentoring programme initiated by the CGIAR[v] in 2008 was developed to provide career development and retain African women in agricultural research and leadership. The mentoring programme runs for two-years for post bachelors fellows and one year for post masters' and postdoctoral fellows. The main aim of the programme is to enable African women to contribute more effectively to poverty alleviation and food security in sub Saharan Africa. Focusing on junior and senior African women and minority groups, it supports and builds the careers, research and leadership skills. Through the programme, mentees (junior AWARD fellows) develop their skills with the guidance of the mentor (senior AWARD fellow) through skills training, networking, and monthly meetings all that comprise the mentoring model. The programme currently operates in 10 Sub Saharan African countries and covers a wide range of disciplines relating to agricultural research and development.

Best practices in AWARD

- Targets on African and minority groups women from undergraduate to postgraduate levels

- Receives adequate funding from donors and partners, and hosted by CGIAR which provides a source for mentors and institutional support

- Has full time staff hired and ensuring the smooth running of the programme

- Mentees are selected through a vigorous application and selection process

- Mentors and mentees are offered an orientation training and coaching assistance

- Every mentoring relationship develops a purpose roadmap and a contract for the mentoring period

- Monitoring and evaluation is done mid-review and final review of both the mentors and mentees to gauge the level of satisfaction and achievements.

- Matching of mentors and mentees is based on country and proximity

- Participants have access to other opportunities in the programme like workshops, trainings conference and research funding

- The mentor and mentee get small allowances to enable them meet physically on a monthly basis

Key lessons from AWARD

- Sustainability of AWARD is dependent of available funding and willingness of other organizations to adopt and institutionalize this programme

- There is not flexibility in the mentoring period- cant be shorter or longer unless otherwise agreed

- Supervisors are not allowed to be one's mentors

- Matching of the mentor and mentee is done by the AWARD Coordinator who does the best to identify the capacities of each of them- this may not always be to the best of the mentor/mentee's interest

- Recruitment is done once a year

- While physical meetings are important, it may also be good to match across country and across continent to allow wider sharing of ideas and widen the mentee's scope.

- If no new mentors are found, those in the programme may get burnt out after one or two phases of mentoring programme

THE AUTHOR AID PROGRAMME AND MENTORING SYSTEM

Author AID [vi]is a global online mentoring programme for young researchers providing networking, mentoring, resources, and training for researchers in developing countries, supported by SIDA[vii], NORAD[viii] and DFID[ix]. It mainly focuses on assisting young researchers in developing countries to publish their scientific work. The Author AID mentors provide advice in - Research methods and analysis; Appropriate journals for submitting manuscripts; Writing scientific papers: content, organization, and style; The peer review process and responding to referees' comments; Presentations and posters; Preparing grant proposals; and Scientific communication in general.

Best Practices in Author AID

- Receives funding from donors and partners and have full time staff working on the programme

- The mentoring relationships and programme is set up entirely online.

- Mentors also have an opportunity to discover mentees from the database, and at times contact them.

- The mentor and mentee design their own mentoring model and timeline, learning agreement thus avoiding burn out.

- Communication between mentor and mentee is based on the Author AID messaging system, but only accessible to the participants

- There is flexibility to have more than one mentor using this online platform

- Recruitment is on a rolling basis meaning a mentee can get assistance any time of the year, and can have several mentors based on his/her needs

- Monitoring and evaluation is through a feedback mechanism which the mentors and mentees are encouraged to contribute to.

- The programme also has an online community, besides the mentoring provides other benefits to members like E- Mail list for discussions, questions, advice and insights from seniors scientists across the globe.

- Members have access to a range of documents and presentations on best practice writing and publication and training workshops on scientific writing.

- Members have a chance to network with other researchers and receive personal mentoring by highly published researchers and professional editors.

- The mentees, they are supposed to be independent thinking beyond and outside the box, and seeking other people's opinions.

Key lessons from Author AID

- Its sustainability will also be dependent on the availability of continued financial and institutional support

- The programme coordinators have very little control of the mentoring process, as they are not allowed to access the information posted on the database

- Physical meetings are very rare if any

- Getting mentors to join the online community is also a challenge in this programme

- Recruitment is on a rolling basis to take care of the ever-arising needs for a mentee; this may at times cause burn out, and mentors may leave the online platform to avoid the responsibility

- One can have more than one mentor or mentee

- It's hard to keep track of the mentoring relationships

THE IUCN-CEC BUDDY EXPERIMENT

This was a pilot intergenerational reverse mentoring model developed and tested by the Commission on Education and Communication of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in 2008. It involved the participation of the members of the commission, young professionals, and youth organizations. This experiment aimed to test one type of model for collaboration, exchange of ideas and experiences, and actions between people of different generations. The programme paired 80 youth from around the world with 80 senior members of the CEC. The programme was supported by funding from the Earth Charter Youth Initiative and HECT Consultancy while IUCN- CEC provided publicity through newsletters and web link pages. The model for operation, described as "Intergenerational Partnership for Sustainability" could be termed as Mentoring and Reverse Mentoring (or Mutual Learning). For the senior partners, the mentoring of young people was an important driver for successful collaboration. The senior professionals benefited through reverse mentoring by the youth, e.g. internet skills, new media, better understanding of youth, and, in general, new and stimulating ideas and new inspiration while the youth were exposed to new opportunities and new cultures and to work on joint projects.

Best Practices in the Buddy Experiment

- Initial funding was available to test this model

- Pairing of individuals from different generations in a mentor/mentee relationship was based on gender and first come basis;

- The young people got internship with NGO and government offices where the seniors were working, or where they were recommended;

- The participating networks / organizations from different generations had a chance of co-managing sustainable development and peace building projects;

- Young people through the programme were now included within NGO and/or country delegations in global governance processes on sustainability;

- There was more support for young people to engage in pertinent scholarship and providing a platform for disseminating and applying their research; and

- Youth organizations consulted and worked in collaboration with seniors on their projects, programmes, etc.

Key lessons from the Buddy Experiment

- It was short term and thus there was no much time and funding to ensure the scaling up of this programme

- Most participants were drawn from the participating organizations

- Matching done based on gender and first come basis- but not the needs of the mentees

- Seniors professionals are always difficult to get them communicate over the internet via emails, workspaces etc. they need training or some sort of motivation

CONCLUSIONS

Regular funding with a restricted budget supports all formal mentoring programmes. Informal, invisible and peer mentoring however, have no direct cost implication that has been mentioned by those interviewed, but if carefully analyzed there is a time and effort cost that is always met by either of the subjects. The lack of funding for the above however, limits the extent to which the mentoring relationship can be successful in terms of achieving some tangible work.

Most formal mentoring programmes have a specific focus on career and leadership. These are clearly outlined in their programme documents. Informal mentoring programmes evolve as the young professionals' needs evolve, and have a wide range of issues to focus on. However, they all address one common issue: identifying one's potential and forging ways of how to support this, acquiring new skills and especially soft skills from the subjects. Informal interviews and interaction with mentees benefitting from the informal mentoring programme highlighted soft skills such as communication skills, personal effectiveness, problem solving, strategic thinking, team building, conflict resolution, negotiation skills, and marketing skills.

Formal mentoring programmes not based on an online platform are mainly based at the country level, and involve regular physical meetings. Online mentoring programmes are worldwide with mentors from working with mentees from different countries meeting online on the programme's workspace, and only meeting physically if the opportunity arises. Informal mentoring usually involves many physical regular meetings whereby they are deliberately done by the mentee because he/she is interested in learning from the mentor. Invisible mentoring is mainly reading the books, articles, emails and other forms of information from the person whom the mentee has a focus on as an invisible mentor. All these forms provide different kinds of relationships.

Selection, matching and initial training of participants is a process carried out in all formal mentoring programmes. This is following by a contract usually referred to as an agreement between the mentor and the mentee. The relationship is time bound, as indicated on the agreement and signed by both subjects. This forms the basis of regular evaluation of the relationship and provides feedback to the programme coordinators. However, this kind of process is lacking in informal mentoring programmes. Mainly the mentee decides whom he/she would like to approach as a mentor. He/she also sets the timeframe for the mentoring and it keeps going on and off. No formal evaluation is conducted and as well, no agreement is signed between the two of them. Where mentors have handpicked mentees, they have set time frames for each of them, but mostly they end the relationship by ensuring they introduce them to other persons who can mentor them beyond their capacity.

The main principles and components of any mentoring relationship have been identified as needs assessment; commitment assessment; identification and matching of partners; the mentoring process; enriching the process; monitoring and evaluation, ad providing feedback.

Major aspects of a mentoring process include:

- A checklist of needs, and expectation from a mentoring relationship. Whether formal or informal, this is essential

- A contract, purpose roadmap, or a learning agreement prepared between the mentor and mentee which details the goals to be achieved, how, meeting time and venue, feedback and confidentiality issues.

- Development plans by the mentee entailing how they intend to achieve the goals agreed on in the contract, resources needed, skills and problem solving mechanisms.

- Formal mentoring programmes must be accompanied by monitoring and evaluation, while in informal mentoring- either of the partners may decide to evaluate the relationship- or even both may come up with an evaluation system to help them assess their progress.

From the interviews, and desktop reviews, key lessons learnt for replication, any mentoring relationships include but not limited to:

- Participants themselves should be in control of choosing a partner/mentor, informal mentoring programmes were highly praised as they provided that platform;

- The time commitment expected from both the mentor and mentee should their responsibility;

- Mentoring is a two way, mutual learning process that can have benefits for juniors and seniors alike. The two subjects should become buddies at the end of the relationship to ensure that in future each subject can always call up on the other for support;

- Communication and learning increase if there is a clear focus, e.g. a career path to discuss or a joint project to realize;

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. YPARD needs to conduct a needs assessment for all its members before a mentoring programme is developed. This will help determine what the members want, how they want it, and who should be part of what they want.

2. It is cost effective if principles and components of the informal peer mentoring can be incorporated in to a formal peer mentoring programmes, ensure that the subjects are buddies and results are delivered.

3. Linking a mentoring relationship to all ongoing projects, programmes and departments in an organization ensures that there is assured support (in terms of resources) and expected tangible results at the end of the mentoring relationship or of project/programme. This would be a major consideration for YPARD's mentoring programme.

4. Any mentoring programme should have a specific focus. All lessons learnt from ongoing mentoring programmes are key to address in a new YPARD mentoring programme, but we should also be keen to ensure that we meet the needs of the members; especially on the areas of focus, e.g. soft skills, scientific writing, agri-business, research, among others.

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ENDNOTES

i Agriculture, Rural Development and Youth in the Information Society

ii Technical Center for Agriculture and Rural Cooperation ACP-EU

iii Information and Communication Technology

iv Coaching is a form of consulting, which will identify strengths, weaknesses, goals, and needs, typically through a series of prearranged sessions over a period of months. The four core elements of the coaching process are support, modeling, step-by-step development, and encouragement

v Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research

vi Author AID website: www.authoraid.info

vii Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency

viii Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation

ix UK Department of International Development