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“Solidarity in a competing world —
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Youth and Agriculture in the Drylands: Realities, Aspirations, Challenges of Rural Youth in Midelt, Morocco

SEBASTIAN MENGEL¹, ALESSANDRA GIULIANI¹, COURTNEY PAISLEY²

¹*Bern University of Applied Sciences (BFH), School of Agricultural, Forest and Food Sciences (HAFL), Switzerland*

²*Young Professionals for Agricultural Development (YPARD), Italy*

Abstract

The province of Midelt, Morocco is located between the High and Middle Atlas. Traditional nomadic and sedentary pastoralism and annual and perennial crops play a vital role for farmers' subsistence and income. The study, supported by the Drylands CGIAR Research Program and YPARD, aims at providing a diagnostic analysis to take into account the specific situations of rural youth engaging in the agricultural livelihood systems of dry areas: 'irrigated', 'rainfed' and 'pastoral'. In 2015 and 2016, a group of researchers conducted a survey comprising 106 in-depth interviews with youth and 28 key informant interviews (parents, teachers, employers, associations and Agricultural Research for Development (AR4D) organisations). Focus group discussions gave youths the opportunity to visualise the 'village of their dreams'.

In areas where food security was assured, youth raised first the issue of primary needs which are not yet fulfilled, i.e. access to education, health care, sanitation and other basic infrastructure. Excessive degradation of natural resources strongly affects local livelihoods. Many youths are illiterate, own no land, little livestock, and are cut out of job opportunities. Young women are in even more unfavourable positions. Their choices and desires are strongly influenced by their fathers or husbands; their level of education is lower than that of their male peers. The use of information and communication technology (ICT) is limited to mobile phones; internet use is not widespread. Training on agricultural practices is required as the present system of associations fails to include youth. Value added activities in agriculture are limited and migration to urban areas is a controversial issue. Many young people expressed their wish to stay in their villages. However, the difficult conditions of establishing their own independent livelihood in their current place may force many of them to leave their homes in search of a better life. This is why it is so crucial to better understand the realities and needs of rural youth in agriculture. Increased attention is required from the perspective of AR4D, and a better focus and collaborative action from different stakeholders must ensure youth do not remain the neglected group that they were in the past.

Keywords: Migration, Morocco, pastoralism, rural youth, youth aspiration