

HAFL Master's Thesis Abstract

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English Title: **Agricultural livelihoods of rural youth in the drylands of Midelt, Morocco: An assessment of realities, viewpoints, challenges, opportunities and aspirations**

English Summary:

Morocco's Midelt province is located between the High and Middle Atlas Mountains. Traditional nomadic and sedentary forms of pastoralism as well as annual and perennial crop production play a vital role in local agricultural livelihood systems (ALSs). While agriculture is the main employer, other income opportunities are limited. Midelt is characterized by harsh natural conditions, particularly in terms of very low annual rainfall. With limited rainfed farming potential, crop production heavily relies on irrigation. Extensive dry pastures are used for live-stock grazing. This master's thesis – embedded in a research study commissioned by the CGIAR Research Program (CRP) on Dryland Systems – investigates the realities, view-points, challenges, opportunities and aspirations of rural youth in the three ALSs of dry areas: pastoral/agro-pastoral, irrigated and rainfed. There is a consensus among scientists and stakeholders in agricultural research for development (AR4D) that more sophisticated data on rural youth is needed. Youth are the future of agriculture, but it is generally assumed that farming is unattractive as more young people turn away from the sector to pursue other livelihoods. World regions characterized by drylands such as the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) are particularly affected by high rural outmigration and youth unemployment. To effectively engage youth in agriculture, it must be understood how they envision desirable farming futures and what it takes to close the gaps between current realities and aspirations.

Mixed methods were applied to provide a diagnostic analysis of rural youth in the drylands of Midelt. The findings suggest how youth's current situations relate to their perceived/existing opportunities and aspirations. Based on the conducted assessment, recommendations were developed to support the youth. Fostering decent, sustainable rural livelihoods must clearly be the overall goal of required support/interventions. The surveyed youth are confronted with numerous, complex challenges that hinder their progress in life. Firstly, youth have highly un-fulfilled basic needs, i.e. limited access to education, training, health care, sanitation, etc. In addition, young women are affected even more by this than their male peers. Missing paved roads and other infrastructure are key constraints in rural life. Youth – particularly female – have very limited decision making capacity. Based on their current situation, there are not many options for young men and women to make a living. To exacerbate this, present farming systems and activities are highly constrained as well. Productive

resources – i.e. land, water, financial capital – are limited, fragmented and mostly inaccessible. This has much to do with the fact that the rural population is not formally organized in interest groups such as associations or cooperatives. There is currently no value added in agriculture. However, it was found that youth's perception of rural life and farming is not per se negative. Many youth envisioned viable rural/agricultural livelihoods. Their aspirations could possibly be matched with their perceived/existing opportunities: the improvement of current ALSs and the development of post-harvest infrastructure/activities. However, the youth do not have the capacity to overcome their challenges. Young men aspire to have their own profitable farm, while female youth made access to basic education and training their priorities. Further findings suggest that rural outmigration is not a first choice for many but often driven by precarious living conditions, i.e. based on push factors. Further research should seek to improve local ALSs, foster organizational development and evaluate the cost/benefit of possible support/interventions. Moreover, youth require better access to infrastructure (above all basic education), training and capacity building (e.g. through a mentoring program). Direct support should aim to structure the local agricultural sector and develop post-harvest infrastructure/activities for inclusive growth. General conclusions/recommendations include that similar, participatory research approaches – taking account of the diversity of youth – be replicated, scaled up and out to better understand and support youth in agriculture. Strategies and policies for engaging youth in the rural/agricultural sector should be developed. Finally, it remains to be said that livelihoods research should categorically be paired with practical support/interventions

Keywords: Rural youth, Agriculture, Livelihood, Dryland, Aspiration

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