



Mid-Term Review

*The Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services
(GFRAS) and Young Professionals for Agricultural
Development (YPARD)*

Final Report

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Disclaimer

The views expressed in this review are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of GFRAS, YPARD, SDC, or any other affiliated organizations. The findings, conclusions, and recommendations are based on information available at the time. They may change as new data emerge. While every effort has been made to ensure accuracy, the authors are not responsible for any errors or omissions.

Abbreviations

AERAS: Agroecology Education and Rural Advisory Services

AFRAAS: African Forum for Agricultural Advisory Services

APIRAS: Asia-Pacific Islands Rural Advisory Services

CHF: Swiss Francs

COP: Conference of the Parties

DCED: Donor Committee for Enterprise Development

EC: European Commission

FAO: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

GFRAS: Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services

IFAD: International Fund for Agricultural Development

IFOAM: International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements

JICA: Japan International Cooperation Agency

JOP: Joint Operational Plan

M&E: Monitoring and Evaluation

NELK: New Extensionist Learning Kit

OECD-DAC: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development - Development Assistance Committee

RASCI: Rural Advisory Services in Central Asia

RAS: Rural Advisory Services

RELAJUR: Red Latinoamericana de Juventudes Rurales

RELASER: Red Latinoamericana para Servicios de Extensión Rural (Latin American Network for Rural Extension Services)

SDC: Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation

SDGs: Sustainable Development Goals

USAID: United States Agency for International Development

YPARD: Young Professionals for Agricultural Development

1. INTRODUCTION

Global challenges like climate change, food insecurity, and rural poverty require effective rural advisory services (RAS) and youth engagement. The Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS) and the Young Professionals for Agricultural Development (YPARD) are addressing these issues through their Joint Operational Plan (JOP) 2021-2025. The plan focuses on sustainable food systems and empowering young agricultural professionals.

GFRAS improves rural livelihoods by enhancing advisory services and integrating farmers into innovation systems. It works through regional networks and 55 Country Fora (CFs), mainly in Africa, linking national, regional, and global efforts. GFRAS is governed by a General Assembly and Board, with its Secretariat hosted by AGRIDEA.

YPARD empowers young agricultural leaders through capacity building, knowledge sharing, and advocacy. It operates globally, supported by a Steering Committee, a Coordinating Unit, and Regional Units hosted in Africa, Europe, and Asia-Pacific. YPARD also has 65 volunteer Country Representatives and is registered as a non-profit in Germany.

1.1 About GFRAS

GFRAS began in 2009 when global agricultural experts recognized the need for a dedicated platform to enhance Rural Advisory Services (RAS). This vision materialized in 2010 with the official launch of GFRAS, hosted by AGRIDEA in Switzerland. Its inaugural Annual Meeting took place in Chile, bringing together stakeholders to discuss challenges and opportunities in rural advisory systems.

In 2012, GFRAS introduced *“The New Extensionist”*, a groundbreaking paper on capacity development for RAS. This initiative paved the way for the New Extensionist Learning Kit (NELK), a practical tool to strengthen the skills of rural advisors and help them address emerging agricultural challenges.

By 2015, GFRAS had expanded its reach, connecting 18 regional and sub-regional networks across the globe. These networks focused on advocacy, professionalization, and knowledge exchange to improve the quality and impact of RAS. GFRAS became a unifying force, fostering collaboration among practitioners, policymakers, and researchers to support farmers effectively. In 2018, GFRAS launched the Global Good Practices Handbook, offering actionable insights and practical guidance to RAS practitioners. This resource further solidified GFRAS’s role as a knowledge hub for rural advisory services.

In 2021, GFRAS partnered with YPARD to develop a joint Strategic Plan (2021–2025). The plan prioritized strengthening networks, ensuring their sustainability, and promoting self-sufficiency. By 2022, GFRAS had supported the establishment of over 50 Country Platforms, primarily in the Global South. These platforms influenced agricultural policies, promoted pluralistic RAS approaches, and enhanced advisory systems tailored to local needs.

In 2023, GFRAS focused on addressing critical global themes. The Global Programme for Small-scale Agroecology Producers and Sustainable Food Systems Transformation (GP-SAEP) project emphasized agroecology in four countries, providing sustainable solutions for rural communities. The integration of NELK modules into higher education institutions ensured the next generation of agricultural advisors would be well-prepared for evolving challenges.

By 2024, GFRAS had achieved its strategic goals. It successfully strengthened Country Fora worldwide, hosted 14 Annual Meetings, and earned global recognition as a leading organization in rural advisory services. GFRAS’s sustained efforts in advocacy, knowledge sharing, and capacity development have made it a cornerstone in advancing sustainable and inclusive agricultural development.

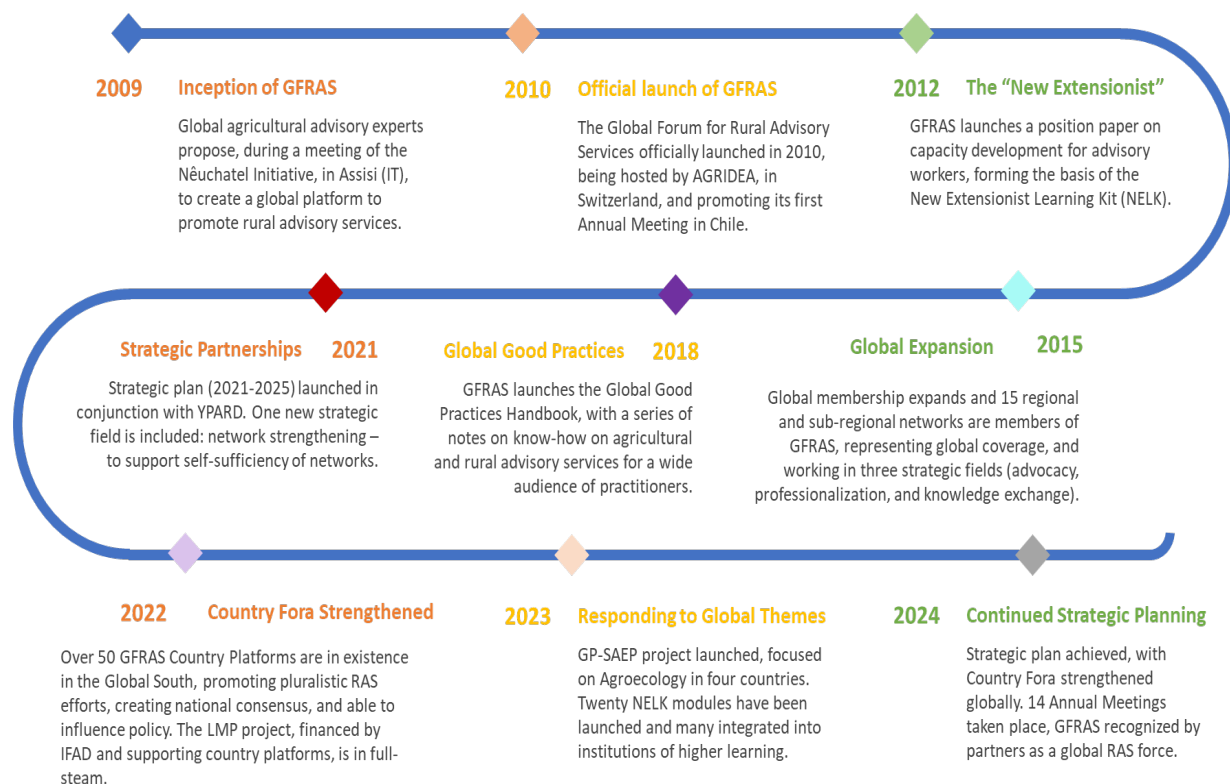


Figure 1: GFRAS milestones, source, GFARS

1.2 About YPARD

YPARD began before 2006 when a group of young scientists in Zurich identified a critical gap: the absence of youth voices in agricultural policy debates. Determined to address this, they secured funding from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). In 2006, YPARD—Young Professionals for Agricultural Development—was officially launched at the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in New Delhi, India. This marked the beginning of its mission to empower youth and advocate for their active role in shaping the future of agriculture.

By 2008, YPARD’s influence began spreading globally with the creation of its first Charter and the formation of regional units in Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Americas. These regions became the backbone of YPARD’s decentralized structure, enabling youth-led initiatives tailored to local needs. The year 2015 marked a phase of global expansion for YPARD. It joined major international initiatives like TAP (Tropical Agriculture Platform) and the YIL Initiative, further strengthening its global network. That year also saw YPARD undergo a strategic rebranding, introducing the current YPARD logo as a symbol of its refreshed identity and purpose.

In 2016, YPARD celebrated its 10th anniversary with simultaneous events across the world. These celebrations highlighted YPARD’s achievements in uniting and empowering young professionals while fostering partnerships to advance youth involvement in agricultural development. By 2019, YPARD entered a phase of strategic growth. The organization revised its Charter and drafted a strategic plan for 2018–2020. Hosting was transferred to AGRIDEA and CZU, and the Global Policy Working Group was launched to strengthen advocacy efforts and policy engagement worldwide.

In 2022, YPARD took bold steps to prioritize policy advocacy and mentorship. It partnered in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference of Parties (UNFCCC COP) Food Systems Pavilion, positioning youth voices at the forefront of climate and food system dialogues. Additionally, YPARD launched the YUFRAS-YPARD Rural Advisers Training Program, offering young rural advisors skills and mentorship to address agricultural challenges.

The momentum continued in 2023 with significant organizational growth. YPARD registered as an organization (e.V.) in Berlin, Germany, solidifying its operational base. Key projects like GP-SAEP and CEA-FIRST were launched, focusing on youth-driven innovation and agricultural development. YPARD also introduced incubator projects in Asia and Latin America, culminating in a major youth summit in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC).

In 2024, YPARD sharpened its strategic direction during a retreat in Berlin. The retreat revisited YPARD's vision and aligned its work with the Rio Conventions, emphasizing sustainability and climate action. A new website was launched, improving communication and outreach to a global audience.

From its humble beginnings to its current role as a global platform, YPARD has empowered thousands of young professionals. By fostering youth leadership, promoting capacity-building, and connecting young voices to global platforms, YPARD continues to drive sustainable agricultural development worldwide.

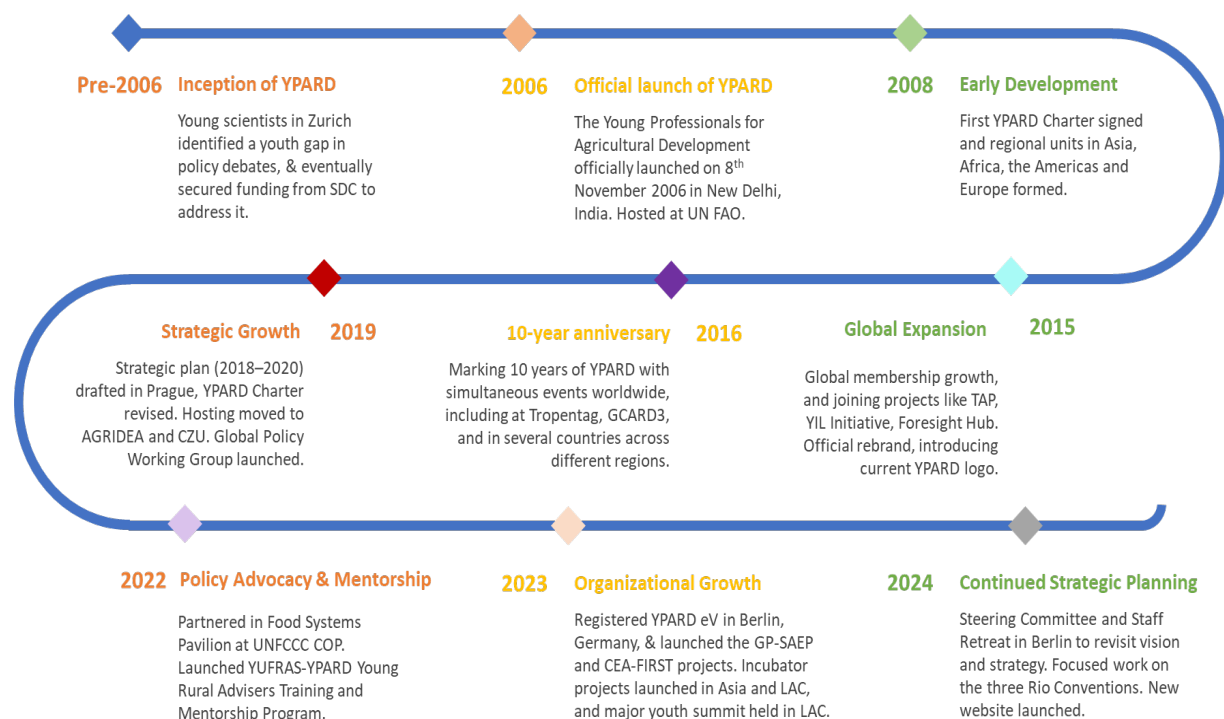


Figure 2: YPARD milestones, source YPARD

1.3 Approaches

To achieve their mission and vision, GFRAS and YPARD focus, as shown in Figure 3 below, on four strategic fields of action and thereby pursue outcomes related to the enabling environment, and organizational and individual capacities

Since 2020, GFRAS and YPARD have partnered to leverage their networks for greater impact. The JOP emphasizes advocacy, professionalization, knowledge sharing, and network sustainability. Its goals include stronger RAS and youth contributions to sustainable food systems and functional, financially stable networks.

The HAFL Hugo P. Cecchini Institute for International Cooperation and Development at the Bern University of Applied Sciences (BFH) conducted a mid-term review of the JOP's implementation, assessing its relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability.



Figure 3: Objective and strategic fields of GFRAS and YPARD

2. OBJECTIVE AND SCOPE OF THE REVIEW

SDC's Evaluation Policy¹ mandates an external, objective assessment of the GFRAS/YPARD JOP implementation from 2021-2025 to inform decision-making, enhance learning, and ensure accountability. The review will assess achievements, challenges, and opportunities in advancing sustainable food systems and youth engagement, address the RAS providers and young agricultural professionals, explore the institutional and financial sustainability of GFRAS and YPARD, and provide recommendations to strengthen the partnership.

The review will focus on the global secretariats' roles in managing projects, the functionality of regional networks and hubs, and the overall organizational and financial setup. It will include interviews with members from GFRAS's 18 regional networks and YPARD's four regional units, with an in-depth analysis of two GFRAS regional networks: AFAAS and RELASER. Its findings will inform the next Operational Plan post-2025.

This review is intended to be systematic and concrete. The review is prepared and carried out so that both the findings and the process are to be used to guide decisions and improve performance. To ensure that the review is useful, this Inception Report has identified the primary intended users and will directly engage them at the start and throughout the review process.

The School of Agricultural, Forest, and Food Sciences (HAFL) at the Bern University of Applied Sciences (BFH) has been mandated by SDC to assess the JOP of GFRAS and YPARD. The findings are expected to support decision-making for SDC on whether to phase out support by the end of 2026. The review of GFRAS and YPARD, part of the project cycle management approach, seeks to support SDC GFRAS/YPARD and other key stakeholders to understand what has worked and what has not, and why.

Initiatives like GFRAS and YPARD have greater control over activities and outputs (e.g., service level improvement). At this level, monitoring and measurement become relatively manageable, enabling the project to know more about results. Outcomes are influenced by projects that are frequently reviewed by mid-term reviews (e.g., appropriate investments in RAS and young professionals' contribution to sustainable food systems sector growth). In contrast, impacts are the goal of impact review (e.g., sustainable food systems). The review seeks to integrate all these processes

¹ SDC Evaluation Policy: https://www.collaboration.eda.admin.ch/en/Documents/Evaluationspolitik_DEZA_EN_03-18.pdf

while focusing on the overall performance of GFRAS and YPARD. As the Terms of Reference (ToR) describes, the review focuses on six critical areas of relevance coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability.

Specifically, the review will:

- Assess achievements, challenges, and opportunities in advancing sustainable food systems and youth engagement.
- Examine the needs and demands of RAS providers and young agricultural professionals and how these needs are addressed by the JOP, in particular at the local level.
- Explore the institutional, organizational, and financial sustainability of GFRAS and YPARD.
- Provide actionable recommendations to strengthen the partnership and maximize its future impact.

3. FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY OF THE REVIEW

The review applies the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development - Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) criteria—coherence, relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability—to assess GFRAS and YPARD. It prioritizes analyzing the JOP’s impact model, Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) quality, and alignment with SDGs and RAS needs. Effectiveness examines progress toward JOP goals, institutional setup, MEL plans, and funding alignment. Relevance evaluates responsiveness to local challenges and contributions of initiatives like LMP and GP-SAEP.

Coherence assesses internal alignment with objectives and external complementarity with other programs, particularly SDC’s frameworks. Efficiency focuses on resource use, timeliness, partnerships, and risk management. Impact reviews advocacy, professionalization (e.g., NELK), knowledge sharing, and network readiness.

Sustainability analyzes governance, financial strategies, and post-SDC viability. It also examines stakeholder engagement, inclusivity, environmental practices, and partnerships. M&E systems and feedback-based adaptations ensure alignment with long-term goals.

The review assessed the two networks’ contributions to advocacy, capacity-building, knowledge management, and network strengthening. The focus was on how their initiatives addressed the needs of RAS agents, youth in agriculture, and marginalized groups. The review highlighted their alignment with the SDGs and systemic changes achieved in policies, practices, and agricultural innovation. Stakeholders’ participation and satisfaction, alongside the integration of local needs into global strategies, were central themes. The ability to adapt governance and partnerships to emerging challenges was a critical focus. Risks, including financial constraints and operational challenges, were explored alongside mitigation strategies. Participation of women, youth, and marginalized groups was emphasized.

The review also highlighted learning and innovation. It examined how lessons were integrated into organizational systems and how innovative approaches were disseminated. Achievements in building durable impacts, fostering ownership, and embedding sustainability into initiatives were reviewed. Stakeholder satisfaction and the timeliness of responses to global and local challenges were key measures of success. The review emphasized the importance of coherence, adaptive strategies, and sustainable solutions to maximize impact.

The review combined qualitative and quantitative methods to assess performance and draw conclusions. Over 60 interviews were conducted online, and more than 40 people responded to surveys representing GFRAS and YPARD’s work. Selection criteria included involvement, knowledge, and stakeholder relevance. The methods aimed to provide actionable insights and ensure broad learning. All interviews will be recorded with the prior consent of the interviewees. The methods aimed to gather diverse insights while ensuring cultural sensitivity and stakeholder ownership.

Key methodologies included:

- Document Review: Analysis of strategic plans, progress reports, financial data, and MEL frameworks.
- Surveys: Online surveys targeted a broad range of stakeholders.
- Interviews: Conducted online with GFRAS and YPARD members, RAS providers, young professionals, and partners. Focus groups supplemented individual interviews where appropriate.

- Case Studies: Highlighted successes, challenges, and lessons, focusing on the African Forum for Agricultural Advisory Services (AFAAS), Red Latinoamericana para Servicios de Extensión Rural (Latin American Network for Rural Extension Services RELASER), and select country Fora activities.

4. Findings and Insights

4.1. Key Achievements

GFARS achievements

GFRAS has achieved significant milestones in promoting Rural Advisory Services (RAS) as a critical approach to sustainable development. According to our interviews, GFRAS has made notable progress in promoting RAS as a key strategy for sustainable development. Respondents highlighted one of its major successes: promoting institutional collaboration, strengthening regional networks, and leaving a good impact on the RAS ecosystem. GFRAS has strengthened networks like RELASER and AFAAS, facilitating cross-country learning and dialogue.

These efforts have resulted in impactful synergies, enabling governments, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and local communities to collaborate on addressing challenges like food security, climate change, and poverty reduction. Our surveys also revealed that GFRAS' support for creating and strengthening country-specific forums has allowed them to operate autonomously while forming valuable partnerships with international bodies, such as the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the European Commission (EC).

(A) Capacity building and knowledge sharing

The interviews and surveys have shown that capacity building is central to GFRAS' mission. Respondents emphasized, for example, that the Agroecology Education and Rural Advisory Services (AERAS) and the New Extensionist Learning Kit (NELK), which have equipped rural advisory service providers with the skills to address issues such as climate change, gender equality, and market access. Peer-to-peer learning events were also frequently mentioned as effective in facilitating the exchange of experiences and best practices, helping advisors adapt solutions to diverse local contexts.

Additionally, the RELASER platform has played an invaluable role in creating sustainable partnerships across Latin America. As noted by the RELASER Network, "It has helped strengthen the network of rural advisory service providers, who now share strategies and solutions more effectively." This collaboration aligns with GFRAS' focus on strengthening networks and enhancing the capacity of rural advisory services to meet evolving challenges.

(B) Youth inclusion

Our exchanges with various stakeholders indicated that GFRAS places significant emphasis on youth inclusion in RAS. Respondents noted that the network's leadership training, skills development, and pathways for youth engagement have empowered young professionals to take on advisory roles and become entrepreneurs in agriculture. This initiative, according to our respondents, addresses the aging population in rural areas and prepares youth to tackle future challenges such as globalization and climate change. As highlighted by a Youth Agricultural Leader, "Engaging youth in rural advisory services is critical to sustaining agricultural productivity. The initiatives by GFRAS have shown that young people are not only willing to participate but are eager to lead innovative solutions." This statement underlines the importance of youth involvement in shaping the future of agriculture and highlights GFRAS' success in fostering the next generation of leaders in rural advisory services.

(C) Innovation in RAS

Our review revealed that GFRAS has embraced innovation in RAS, particularly by promoting digital tools and smart agricultural practices. Our respondents pointed to platforms and mobile applications as essential in making information more accessible to farmers. These tools help farmers manage pest outbreaks and climate fluctuations. According to the interviews, scaling up pilot projects and introducing cost-effective technologies have enhanced the resilience of rural communities to environmental changes. As a Digital Agriculture Expert noted, "The incorporation of digital tools in advisory services has transformed the way we work with farmers. Now, advice can be delivered instantly, and farmers

are more engaged than ever before in their agricultural practices." This insight highlights how digital innovation, supported by GFRAS, has impacted advisory services, empowering farmers to take more control over their agricultural practices and adapt to changing environmental conditions.

(D) Policy influence

Respondents also consistently highlighted GFRAS' strategic role in policy influence. The interviews showed that GFRAS has been actively involved in shaping global agricultural policy through advocacy and participation in international dialogues. Its efforts to professionalize advisory services through initiatives like the New Extensionist Movement were frequently mentioned. Furthermore, according to our exchanges, GFRAS' commitment to inclusive policy dialogues has ensured that marginalized voices, such as those of farmers and rural advisors, are included in decision-making processes. As a Country Forum Member stated, "The dialogues enabled us to address controversial issues like GMOs with transparency and inclusivity." This reflects GFRAS' effectiveness in promoting open and inclusive discussions on complex agricultural issues, ensuring that all perspectives are considered in policy development and decision-making.

(E) Institutional collaboration and networking

A key achievement of GFRAS is its support and strengthening of a global platform for collaboration in RAS. Through regional networks like RELASER, AFRAAS, and the Rural Advisory Services in Central Asia (RASCI), GFRAS has facilitated dialogue among governments, NGOs, the private sector, and local communities. It has also contributed to the establishment of the Arab Forum for Rural Advisory Services (AFRAS). All these have led to significant discussions on the importance of strengthening, improving, and evolving advisory systems, addressing challenges in sustainable agriculture, food security, and climate change. Additionally, GFRAS has contributed to structuring regional initiatives in collaboration with networks such as AFRAAS, RELASER, and others.

As highlighted by the EC representative, "One major achievement of GFRAS is certainly the successful structuring of an international discussion space with various donors around agricultural advisory services. This has led to discussions on the importance of strengthening, improving, and evolving advisory systems and structuring regional initiatives with different organizations." GFRAS also supports country fora, promoting innovation and attracting valuable partnerships with organizations like the European Commission and IFAD.

YPARD achievements

YPARD has been equally influential in empowering young professionals to lead agricultural transformation and address global food security challenges. Respondents stated that youth empowerment and leadership are at the heart of YPARD's mission. Through training programs, mentorship, and youth-led initiatives such as Youth Action for Climate Change, YPARD has equipped young people with the skills and networks needed to actively contribute to agricultural development. According to the interviews, these programs are preparing youth to become solution-driven leaders, focusing on climate resilience and sustainable farming.

Building youth networks and partnerships

The interviews and surveys showed that YPARD has been successful in building global networks of youth agriculturalists. Respondents noted that the organization has effectively connected young professionals worldwide, promoting collaboration and solidarity. Partnerships with organizations like FAO and networks like RELAJUR were mentioned as crucial for amplifying youth voices in agricultural dialogues and creating spaces for shared learning and resource exchange. According to our exchanges, these networks help young professionals feel part of larger movements advocating for agricultural and rural transformation.

Advocacy for agroecology and sustainability

YPARD's advocacy for agroecology and sustainability was another key achievement highlighted by our respondents. Interviews revealed that by promoting agroecological practices, YPARD has supported youth-led farms that enhance biodiversity, soil health, and climate resilience. "Agroecology is a vital part of the future of agriculture, and YPARD has helped me realize that as a youth leader. It's about ensuring that the land remains productive and resilient for future generations," shared a Youth Advocate from Latin America. This approach blends science with local knowledge,

demonstrating the potential for young people to be leaders in both environmental stewardship and sustainable agriculture.

(C) Digital tools for youth

"The digital tools YPARD has developed have changed how we access agricultural advice. We now have the resources to make better decisions for our farms, and it has significantly boosted productivity," stated a Youth Agri-entrepreneur in Asia. Our surveys showed that YPARD has recognized the importance of technology in supporting youth in agriculture. Respondents emphasized the role of digital platforms in improving access to information, market trends, and mentorship. These tools have bridged gaps in rural areas, enabling young farmers to connect with experts and peers across regions. According to our exchanges, enhancing digital literacy has empowered young people to navigate and succeed in the increasingly technology-driven agricultural landscape.

(D) Global advocacy and participation

YPARD's global advocacy and participation in forums such as the World Food Forum and the Committee on World Food Security were highlighted by our respondents. The interviews showed that YPARD ensures youth perspectives are included in global policy discussions, facilitating access to mentorship, funding, and collaborative platforms. As a YPARD representative in Europe noted, "YPARD amplifies youth voices in agriculture by engaging in global discussions on SDGs and climate change, ensuring youth issues are represented." YPARD simplifies major topics like the Conference of Parties (COP) and biodiversity, making them accessible to young people and guiding their engagement. For example, in Uganda, YPARD influenced the national youth employment strategy, prioritizing agriculture for young professionals.

(E) Youth empowerment and leadership

YPARD has been a leader in promoting youth empowerment in agriculture, equipping young people with the skills, networks, and platforms needed to lead in the sector. As one youth leader from Africa shared, "YPARD has equipped me with the knowledge and the platform to lead my community's agricultural projects. Youth leadership is essential to achieving the sustainable future we need in agriculture." Through initiatives like Youth Action for Climate Change, YPARD has provided opportunities for youth to influence decisions on sustainable agriculture and climate resilience. Its training programs, mentorship, and youth-led projects have helped young people transition from participants to active leaders, preparing them to address agricultural challenges in their communities.

4.2. Challenges and Proposed Solutions

GFRAS: Overcoming structural and strategic barriers

(A) Challenges in network cohesion

GFRAS faces challenges in aligning its diverse membership. The network spans different countries and contexts, which makes it hard to synchronize goals and responsibilities. "The clarity brought by the leadership has played an important change in the way how we work together. There is a sense of purpose and direction now, something that was lacking before. Yet this is not sufficient. There is a tension between the global secretariat, on the one hand, and the regional networks and the national fora, on the other hand," explained an expert in Asia. Our exchanges showed that the lack of clear communication strategies and mentorship practices worsens the situation, leading to inefficiencies at various levels of the network. In other words, the absence of structured communication and guidance prevents stakeholders from fully understanding each other's roles and priorities.

(B) Formalizing partnerships

Another significant issue identified is the informal nature of many of GFRAS' partnerships. The findings suggest that these partnerships lack clearly defined roles and joint initiatives. "GFRAS has the potential to transform partnership dynamics by enhancing stronger, more formal collaborations. Clear agreements and defined roles will ensure that every stakeholder is aligned and that mutual benefits are realized. This approach will strengthen GFRAS' value proposition and pave the way for long-term, impactful partnerships," explained a former member of the Global Secretariat. This lack of formal structure impedes collaboration and prevents the network from reaching its full potential. By formalizing

partnerships, GFRAS could ensure that each party has a well-defined role and commitment. Consequently, this would promote more impactful and sustained collaboration across the network.

(C) Funding challenges

GFRAS heavily relies on project-based funding. Research shows that this dependence on short-term funding undermines long-term planning and the achievement of strategic goals. "Due to the constant search for funding, GFRAS is less able to adopt a long-term strategic outlook. Consequently, the network is more likely to react to the priorities of their donors than to assert their agenda and drive progress," explained a multilateral organization representative. Therefore, it makes sense that GFRAS focuses on securing stable, multi-year funding sources. Hiring a dedicated business development manager could help in strengthening proposals and securing larger, more consistent grants, which would ensure the sustainability of the network in the long run.

(D) Fragmentation of RAS

The fragmentation of RAS at global, regional, and national levels has created redundancy and competition within the sector. This fragmentation leads to inefficiencies, as indicated by the interviews. "GFRAS faces challenges of distinguishing itself from NGOs, global research institutions, multilateral organizations, and to some extent universities. I believe GFRAS has an advantage (e.g., an independent and global leader and catalyst) which, however, has not been well-articulated and differentiated," stated an expert from North America. GFRAS has the opportunity to address this by coordinating efforts across its network. By promoting collaboration, GFRAS can reduce duplication, unify fragmented efforts, and maximize its impact in the sector.

(E) Need for a functional and right-sized Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework

In light of the findings, it is evident that GFRAS needs a right-sized and functional M&E framework. The lack of an effective M&E framework hinders the network's ability to track progress and ensure accountability. "I am sure GFRAS has contributed a lot to addressing complex problems through a relevant, accessible, and pluralistic RAS. The causality of such contribution is quite difficult to establish without a sound M&E system," said a representative of a regional network. An improved M&E framework would provide critical insights into the network's activities, enabling data-driven decisions that improve operations and outcomes.

YPARD: Strengthening foundations and youth engagement

(A) Funding challenges

Despite the recent improvements, YPARD struggles with unstable funding, which limits its ability to plan for long-term growth. YPARD needs an operating budget of at least 250,000 EUR/year to support the core staff members and administrative functions. "The inconsistency in funding severely hampers our ability to implement transformative programs that address long-term goals, as we are often limited to reacting to immediate needs. A more stable and predictable funding stream would enable us to plan and execute projects that create lasting impact, rather than just short-term solutions," said a member from a country chapter. According to the interviews, without consistent financial resources, YPARD cannot sustain its decentralized network of young agricultural professionals. This will lead to difficulties in maintaining operations and building a solid foundation for future expansion. In other words, YPARD will need to diversify its funding sources to ensure long-term sustainability. This could be by adopting a multi-layered resource mobilization strategy that involves partnerships with donors, governments, and the private sector.

(B) Communication and coordination

In comparison to funding challenges, communication and coordination across YPARD's global network is also a major issue. The findings suggest that poor communication leads to operational inefficiencies, making it hard to align local initiatives with the global objectives of the organization. "Communication strategies must be tailored to each context. What resonates in one country may not be effective in another, as cultural, social, and economic differences shape how messages are received. A flexible and localized approach is essential to ensure that communication efforts are relevant and impactful," explained a country chapter representative. Specifically, our findings suggest that YPARD should develop localized communication strategies that are tailored to regional contexts. This localized approach would help

to align global and local efforts, enhancing the effectiveness of YPARD's network. Furthermore, training and support for local volunteers would be crucial to ensure that they are well-equipped to implement these strategies effectively.

(C) Mentorship programs

YPARD also faces challenges with its mentorship programs. Our exchanges with many of the respondents showed that, despite the availability of mentorship programs, they remain underutilized in many regions. "The mentoring kits seem useful, but they're not accessible enough or we are not sure if they are used to create real impact," said two respondents, one a young agripreneur and another a representative of a country chapter. The lack of awareness and adaptation to local needs prevents young professionals from benefiting fully from these resources. To address this, YPARD could launch awareness campaigns to promote mentorship and ensure that resources are used. Tailoring mentorship programs to local contexts would enable YPARD to empower young leaders in agriculture, helping them to develop skills and become effective change-makers.

(D) Shifting youth perceptions of agriculture

One of the significant challenges for YPARD is shifting youth perceptions of agriculture. Many young people in rural areas view farming as an unattractive and financially unstable career. "When I think about agriculture, I imagine hard, dirty work with little room for growth. But after hearing stories from young people who've built successful agribusinesses, I now see it as a field full of possibilities. The question is: how can YPARD effectively contribute to the shift? I have not seen clear evidence yet," said a donor representative. This perception contributes to the aging workforce in the agricultural sector. Therefore, YPARD can help address this issue by showcasing success stories that highlight the dynamic and innovative potential of agriculture. Additionally, peer networks can play a vital role in changing perceptions by providing young people with a platform to share experiences and inspire others to consider agriculture as a fulfilling and impactful career.

4.3. Opportunities: Future Potential

GFRAS

(A) Academic collaboration and advocacy

According to our findings, respondents emphasized the importance of leveraging emerging technologies and data-driven tools to modernize RAS. "The collaboration with research institutions has often been limited to informal discussions and corridor networking at conferences, which represents a missed opportunity. While it's not too late to capitalize on this potential, it will require a proactive, persistent, and focused strategy from the Global Secretariat to drive meaningful collaboration forward," said two respondents, one an expert in Asia and another a donor representative.

Indeed, GFRAS is not expected to produce this content itself (because the network does not have the resources). However, it can build the capacity of youth by partnering with organizations that specialize in producing this content, such as the FAO eLearning Academy and universities. Collaborations with academic institutions are key to evidence-based advocacy, particularly in integrating digital tools and climate-resilient practices into RAS. In the short term, GFRAS can focus on producing policy briefs and capacity-building programs to equip stakeholders with the tools needed for the adoption of these technologies. Long-term, GFRAS should aim to drive systemic policy changes that embed digital solutions and climate-smart practices within agricultural frameworks, making these approaches integral to the sector's future development.

(B) Youth engagement and innovation

In light of the "youth bulge" in developing countries, GFRAS has a unique opportunity to empower young people to drive innovation in agriculture. The findings suggest that, through targeted training, mentorship, and advocacy, GFRAS can support youth-led adoption of digital tools and sustainable practices. Specifically, GFRAS can help nurture a new generation of farmers and entrepreneurs who are advocates for climate-resilient and technology-driven agriculture. In other words, by investing in youth leadership, GFRAS can reshape the agricultural sector into one that is more inclusive,

dynamic, and future-oriented. This positions GFRAS as more than just a knowledge facilitator but as a central player in reshaping agricultural practices globally.

(C) Regional networks and local solutions

The findings indicate that decentralized development cooperation, which emphasizes local ownership, offers a significant opportunity for GFRAS to strengthen its regional networks and national fora. "I am aware of several African governments that are keen to see GFRAS engage more closely with RAS. A strategic approach would be to strengthen the connections between the country fora and the Global Secretariat, enabling more effective collaboration with local and national governments. This could be a key opportunity to drive the 'localization agenda' in RAS, ensuring that advisory services are tailored to the specific needs of local communities while also aligning with national development priorities," said an agricultural development expert.

By facilitating "South-South" knowledge exchanges, GFRAS can effectively promote the development of localized solutions to global challenges, such as climate change and food security. Moreover, GFRAS can, in a more impactful way, advocate for inclusive models of RAS that are tailored to specific regional contexts. This ensures that agricultural development is both relevant and sustainable in diverse regions. In comparison to centralized approaches, this model allows GFRAS to build stronger connections with local stakeholders and support bottom-up development, which can be more resilient and context-specific.

(D) Funding diversification

In response to the shifting landscape of agricultural finance, GFRAS has the potential to explore innovative funding models. According to the interviews, these include green financing, public-private partnerships, and collaborations with global donors. By establishing initiatives like a Climate Resilience Fund or collaborating with AgTech companies, GFRAS is well-positioned to attract funding for cutting-edge projects addressing critical agricultural challenges. Additionally, aligning with international agencies like the World Bank could provide access to additional resources and expertise, enabling GFRAS to scale sustainable agricultural solutions globally. This approach could make GFRAS a key player in securing the necessary financial resources for transformative change in agriculture.

YPARD

(A) Scaling local successes

YPARD's strong grassroots network offers a significant opportunity to scale successful local agricultural initiatives. "I believe we'll move toward creating mechanisms that allow country representatives to make strategic decisions. For example, since last year, in the case of political stances, we opened working groups on policy. This is a space where country representatives can participate, such as in YPARD's stance on the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) or climate change," noted a member of YPARD's Steering Committee. The data shows that, by adapting and sharing these models globally, YPARD can amplify its impact. With a reach of over 32,000 young people worldwide, YPARD has the potential to serve as a platform for promoting youth-led innovation in agriculture. Specifically, scaling these local successes could inspire other regions and contribute to a collective effort to transform the agricultural sector through youth engagement. By highlighting successful youth-led initiatives, YPARD can establish itself as a key advocate for youth-driven transformation in agriculture.

(B) Capacity building and networking

YPARD has the opportunity to strengthen its volunteer base and expand its impact by prioritizing capacity-building programs. "Our ability to reach new audiences and tackle local issues has grown thanks to the skills and networks we've built through YPARD. If we want to maintain this momentum, we need more training opportunities and stronger connections to other youth leaders," said a YPARD member. Research² shows that addressing global agricultural challenges through targeted training can enhance YPARD's ability to offer tailored solutions. Expanding partnerships and advancing knowledge-sharing networks will ensure that YPARD is equipped to respond to the evolving needs of the

² Chittoor, J.S. and Mishra, S.K., 2012. Agricultural Education for Sustainable Rural Development in Developing Countries—Challenges and Policy Options. *Journal of Education and Learning (EduLearn)*, 6(2), pp.119-132.

agricultural sector. This will empower young people with the skills and knowledge necessary to lead in agriculture, ensuring that YPARD's contributions to the sector remain impactful and sustainable over the long term.

(C) Policy advocacy and youth engagement

YPARD's global network presents a unique opportunity for the movement to position itself as a leader in youth-driven agricultural policy. The findings suggest that engaging in global policy consultations, showcasing successful youth-led agricultural initiatives, and building strategic partnerships can help drive systemic change. Despite facing resource constraints, YPARD's global reach remains a powerful tool for influencing policies that promote agroecology, sustainable farming, and youth inclusion in agricultural development. By continuing to advocate for these policies, YPARD can lead efforts to integrate youth perspectives into decision-making processes and ensure that the agricultural sector embraces inclusivity and sustainability.

(D) Technology and digital tools

The potential for technology to modernize agriculture is vast, and YPARD has a critical opportunity to lead in this area. "By leveraging opportunities in the digital space, we can effectively address market barriers. While scaling these initiatives may be challenging without consistent financial support, we can overcome this by focusing on strategic partnerships and collaboration," said a YPARD representative in Africa. According to research, digital tools such as climate-smart apps and precision farming technologies offer transformative solutions for agricultural productivity and sustainability.³ By collaborating with technology partners, offering training, and advocating for youth-inclusive policies, YPARD can help create scalable digital solutions. Additionally, a right-sized and functional M&E framework will be essential to ensure continuous improvement. YPARD's efforts in this area could position the organization as a leader in the digital transformation of agriculture, ultimately catalyzing broader adoption of digital innovations across the sector. This approach will help YPARD increase its influence and extend its impact on global agricultural practices.

4.4. Risks and Risk Management

GFRAS

(A) Fragile regional network support due to limited organizational capacity

We asked respondents, "What if GFRAS disappears?" Many believed most regional networks would weaken or vanish, with only a few surviving. Findings from over 60 interviews and surveys highlight challenges like fragmented regional networks, including newer ones like AFRAS. This fragmentation undermines GFRAS's effectiveness, stakeholder trust, and collaboration.

To address these issues, GFRAS should adopt a "shared leadership" model to enhance ownership and responsibility across networks. A digital platform for resource-sharing and tracking could improve access to information and collaboration. Additionally, a "regional resilience fund", supported by local contributions and co-financed by governments and NGOs, would reduce dependence on central funding and strengthen regional sustainability. These measures would ensure GFRAS's continued relevance and impact.

(B) Perceived conflicts of interest

The 2019 Assessment of the GFRAS Operational Plan Assessment (2016 (2016-20) has found that the need felt for more involvement and engagement with the private.⁴ Our finding is a bit contrary to this: There is a concern about GFRAS' affiliations with private sector actors, which may raise doubts about its neutrality and credibility. To mitigate this, GFRAS could adopt transparent governance structures, guided by frameworks like the "Kampala Principles,"⁵ to ensure fairness and impartiality. Regular independent audits and the use of technology for financial transparency would help restore

³ Vishnoi, S. and Goel, R.K., 2024. Climate-smart agriculture for sustainable productivity and healthy landscapes. *Environmental Science & Policy*, 151, p.103600.

⁴ Chancellor, T. Kumar, R. and Forsythe, L. (2019). "Assessment of the GFRAS Operational Plan," GFRAS.

⁵ Available [here](#).

trust. Furthermore, establishing innovation labs to explore ethical models for public-private partnerships would ensure that collaborations align with GFRAS' core values and maintain its integrity.

(C) Over-reliance on donor funding

The survey results suggest that GFRAS' heavy reliance on a narrow donor base presents a risk to its financial sustainability. As donor priorities shift, GFRAS may face challenges in maintaining stable funding. To address this, GFRAS could diversify its funding sources by exploring "impact investment strategies" and "social bonds," linking financial support to measurable outcomes. Additionally, a membership-based funding model could be introduced, where stakeholders pay for tailored services or access to resources. This would spread financial risk and provide a more stable revenue stream.

However, it is not clear to us why, according to the 2023 report, GFRAS has decided not to actively seek additional project funding at the global level. Instead, the focus for the coming years will be on securing additional core funding. This position is a missed opportunity for GFRAS to diversify income, reduce reliance on core funding, and drive innovation. Balancing core funding with global project funding could better address fragmentation and resource challenges while strengthening its global impact.

(D) Limited organizational capacity

GFRAS' small secretariat struggles to manage donor-driven projects and advocate for global agricultural advisory services effectively. The findings suggest that adopting a "distributed team model" could help. By leveraging regional consultants and digital collaboration tools, GFRAS could increase its capacity without significantly expanding the core team. Partnering with cross-sector innovation hubs would also provide access to external expertise, increasing organizational capacity at minimal cost.

(E) Outdated tools and engagement strategies

GFRAS' limited digital presence reduces its visibility and hampers stakeholder engagement. According to the findings, modernizing its engagement strategies is crucial. A "digital-first strategy"⁶ incorporating advanced analytics, interactive platforms, and gamification would enhance stakeholder interaction. Upgrading tools such as the website and integrating crowdsourced knowledge creation would improve accessibility and visibility, making GFRAS more engaging for its diverse stakeholders.

YPARD

(A) Potential leadership disruptions

YPARD's informal structure creates challenges during leadership transitions, as reported by many survey respondents. This can disrupt organizational continuity and momentum. To mitigate this risk, YPARD could develop a "virtual leadership toolkit,"⁷ which includes standardized processes and clear guidelines for transitions. An advisory board composed of alumni or former leaders could offer guidance and support during leadership changes, ensuring stability and continuity.

(B) Policy advocacy challenges

YPARD risks being overshadowed in crowded policy advocacy spaces, according to survey respondents. To address this, instead of competing for visibility, YPARD should curate and showcase its collective achievements through strategic collaborations with established policy forums. Using affordable digital tools, YPARD can amplify youth voices and gain visibility without competing for attention. This strategy would ensure that YPARD's contributions are recognized, strengthening its influence and ensuring its perspectives are included in key policy dialogues.

⁶ A distributed team model involves team members working remotely from different locations, often across time zones. It relies on digital tools like Slack, Zoom, and Trello for communication and collaboration, enabling flexibility and access to a global talent pool.

⁷ A virtual leadership toolkit is a set of resources, strategies, and tools designed to help leaders effectively manage and guide remote or distributed teams. It focuses on fostering communication, collaboration, and engagement in virtual environments.

(C) Financial and skill limitations

Without donor support, YPARD faces significant financial constraints that limit its ability to scale initiatives and develop skills within its network. Our survey and interview data indicate that pursuing micro-grants and forming consortia with other NGOs or partners could help fund specialized projects. This would help accelerate the success reported by YPARD in the 2023 report: YPARD was successful in securing three competitive grants for project work, a considerable milestone in YPARD's history. Low-cost e-learning platforms offering modular agricultural courses can provide value without heavy investment, while collaborations with agricultural universities and technical institutes can offer free or subsidized training. Volunteer mentors from the YPARD alumni network can help address skill gaps.

However, a recurring challenge highlighted during the review process was the unclear definition of YPARD's role. To address this, YPARD needs to clearly define and communicate its mission to demonstrate its value to potential donors. By positioning itself as a credible technical partner in collaboration with NGOs and other organizations, YPARD can enhance its visibility and viability for investment. To achieve this, a dedicated team should map opportunities, engage potential partners, and clearly articulate YPARD's unique contributions and expertise. If YPARD does not know its own value, it will be difficult for others to recognize it (see the value proposition section below).

(D) Loose network structure

YPARD's voluntary network structure makes consistent engagement challenging. The findings suggest that introducing a "points-based engagement system" could incentivize active participation and contributions. A tiered membership model⁸ would generate modest revenue while clarifying expectations for involvement. Additionally, providing free project management tools would help facilitate coordination and improve engagement. This would ensure dynamic participation, making YPARD's network more effective and ensuring that the organization remains relevant to its members.

5. Spotlights on Strategic Issues

The previous sections highlight both common and distinctive aspects of the two networks, including areas such as funding, managing various levels of networks, policy advocacy, digitalization, and monitoring and measuring impacts. These represent shared features that influence their operations and effectiveness.

While the Terms of Reference (ToR) for this review emphasized the Joint Operational Plan (JOP), stating that *"The purpose of the evaluation is to provide SDC with an external and objective assessment of the results achieved so far under the implementation of the GFRAS/YPARD Joint Operational Plan, which will last until December 2025,"* our analysis found out that the JOP functions primarily as a funding instrument rather than the only strategic framework guiding the review.

To address this limitation, we have identified four overarching themes—one of those being the JOP— that better contribute to the Learning-Accountability-Steering "triangle" underpinning this review. These themes provide a more robust structure for analyzing the networks' performance and fostering actionable insights.

5.1. Value Propositions

By value propositions, the review focused on how GFRAS and YPARD differentiate themselves in their offerings and priorities, showcasing their achievements while addressing challenges in maintaining their unique identities. After gathering insights from over 60 respondents worldwide, we have distilled the feedback into seven core criteria to analyze the value propositions of GFRAS and YPARD. The reviewers considered these as the "compass" to navigate what the two networks offer.

Clarity and coherence

⁸ A structure where an organization offers multiple levels of membership, each with different benefits, pricing, or access privileges. This model is commonly used by associations, clubs, or subscription-based services to cater to diverse member needs and budgets.

It took us a significant amount of time to understand the value propositions of both GFRAS and YPARD, like decoding a puzzle with missing pieces. To get to the core of it, we posed the critical “what if” question: “What would happen if GFRAS or YPARD ceased to exist?” This approach helped us uncover missing elements that respondents had casually mentioned, transforming them into potential value propositions. The primary challenge, however, lies in the widespread claim that every organization and institution offers the best solutions for farmers and youth. In such claims and counterclaims, the real challenge becomes identifying what differentiates the two networks—GFRAS and YPARD—and what sets them apart in delivering their value propositions.

GFRAS’ value proposition is clearly articulated. It positions itself as a global “convener” for rural advisory services, targeting smallholder farmers, extension agents, and rural development practitioners. Its approach, rooted in multi-stakeholder engagement through regional networks, is easy to grasp. However, its communication occasionally leans toward technical jargon, which might dilute its appeal to broader audiences.

YPARD’s value proposition is also clear and focused on “empowering young professionals” in agricultural development. Its youth-centric narrative is highly relatable and resonates well with its audience. By explicitly addressing the needs of young agriculturalists, it differentiates itself as a niche player. However, its articulation at the global level sometimes lacks the precision to position it as a leader in high-level policy discussions—as one respondent put it “like trying to win a race with a great start but occasionally tripping over the movement’s own shoelaces”.

Relevance to stakeholders

GFRAS effectively addresses the priorities of rural advisory service providers and smallholder farmers. “GFRAS provides a neutral platform that connects diverse networks, ensuring harmonized approaches to rural advisory services. Their tools, like the New Extensionist Learning Kit, reflect a commitment to practical, grassroots-oriented solutions,” said a representative of an international association. Its emphasis on building capacity, sharing knowledge, and promoting partnerships is well-aligned with the needs of these stakeholders. However, its engagement with emerging themes, such as youth empowerment and digital tools, is sporadic, potentially limiting its relevance to younger and tech-savvy stakeholders.

YPARD is highly relevant to its target group—youth in agriculture. It identifies and addresses challenges such as limited visibility, resources, and opportunities for young professionals. Its grassroots initiatives, like integrating young extensionists into regional networks, add direct value. However, its narrow focus might exclude broader youth demographics, such as those outside formal education or in non-conventional agricultural roles.

Uniqueness and differentiation

“GFRAS brings valuable experience and a breadth of perspectives through its regional networks, while YPARD drives youth-centered innovation and inclusion in agriculture. Together, they create a powerful platform for advancing food systems,” said the YPARD Chair of the Steering Committee. GFRAS’ unique strength lies in its regional network model, which tailors advisory services to local needs while maintaining a global perspective. Its NELK stands out as a practical tool for capacity building. However, its differentiation is less pronounced in cutting-edge areas such as digital agriculture, where competitors are making significant inroads.

YPARD’s distinctiveness is its exclusive focus on young professionals. Its informal, dynamic approach to engagement is refreshing in an often-rigid sector. It excels in connecting grassroots youth to global forums, offering a platform that other networks often overlook. However, its fragmented advocacy at the global level could hinder its ability to sustain this differentiation. The reasons, according to your interviews and further research, could be the nature of competing global youth conferences and events; inconsistent policy and institutional frameworks related to agriculture (e.g., health, education, finance, and others); lack of coordination among youth-led movements; and competing interests among stakeholders.

Tangibility of benefits

The benefits offered by GFRAS, such as harmonized advisory services and capacity building, are clear and measurable. Testimonials highlight improved extension systems and better collaboration among stakeholders. However, its contributions to broader outcomes, like food security or poverty reduction, are less tangible and harder to evaluate.

“YPARD empowers young professionals by making global discussions on agriculture accessible and actionable. Their role in connecting rural youth with opportunities to present their projects at international forums is unmatched,” said a YPARD country representative in Europe. YPARD offers tangible benefits like capacity-building workshops, networking opportunities, and support for young professionals to participate in global events. These benefits directly enhance the career prospects of its target audience. However, the outcomes—such as youth-driven innovations—are less consistently measured or communicated.

Alignment with goal

“GFRAS has effectively amplified the global voice of rural advisory services, promoting collaboration and driving systemic changes through its strong policy advocacy and support for regional networks,” said a regional representative in North America. GFRAS’ activities align well with its goal to enhance rural advisory services. Its focus on systemic challenges, such as improving institutional capacity and policy environments, supports broader development goals like sustainability and equity. However, its relatively slow integration of emerging issues like climate change or gender inclusivity may limit its alignment with global priorities.

YPARD’s mission to empower youth aligns seamlessly with its activities. Its grassroots focus supports broader societal goals by fostering innovation and inclusivity in agriculture. However, the limited scope of its advocacy efforts sometimes hinders its contribution to systemic change (e.g., changing norms of parents or policymakers, shifting practices and behaviors of young people).

Feasibility and credibility

GFRAS has a strong track record of delivering on its targets. Its decentralized structure and regional networks enhance its credibility. However, its limited engagement with digital innovation could raise doubts about its adaptability to modern challenges.

“YPARD’s youth-centric approach has enabled the mobilization of youth across the globe despite the challenge of harnessing the voice to transformative changes; this takes time and improved organizational structures and processes,” said an expert in global agricultural innovations. YPARD demonstrates credibility through its ability to mobilize resources and connect youth to opportunities. Its grassroots success stories reinforce its feasibility. However, its highly decentralized and loosely connected chapters occasionally result in uneven delivery across regions/country chapters.

Adaptability and responsiveness

GFRAS is moderately adaptable, evident in its regional network structure that accommodates local needs. However, it has been slow to address new themes like digital tools or youth empowerment consistently. Incorporating stronger feedback mechanisms could enhance its responsiveness.

YPARD excels in adaptability, given its youth-centric and decentralized model. It incorporates feedback from members to refine its offerings. However, its limited capacity to influence global policy indicates room for improvement in responding to systemic challenges as discussed above.

Table 1: Summary table on value propositions

Factor	GFRAS	YPARD
Clarity and Coherence	Clear but technical	Clear and relatable but less precise
Relevance	Highly relevant but sporadic on emerging themes	Relevant to youth, but excludes broader demographics
Uniqueness	Strong regional models and tools like NELK	Youth-focused, but fragmented global advocacy

Tangibility	Clear capacity-building benefits, less on broader outcomes	Tangible benefits for youth, limited outcome measurement
Alignment	Aligns with a mission, slower on emerging priorities	Well-aligned with a mission, limited systemic contribution
Feasibility	Strong track record of delivery	Feasible, but regional variations in delivery
Adaptability	Moderately adaptable, needs better feedback mechanisms	Highly adaptable, limited global policy responsiveness

5.2. The Joint Operational Plan (JOP)

The JOP was conceived to align the efforts of two networks, GFRAS and YPARD, towards a common goal, enhancing synergy and collaboration. However, according to our findings, the reality of operationalizing this plan has proven more difficult than anticipated. While the idea of collaboration between the networks is noble, differing priorities, operational approaches, and organizational cultures have led to significant friction rather than the intended harmonious partnership. As a result, there is growing consensus that the networks might be better off functioning independently, allowing each to focus on its distinct strengths and missions without the burden of “forced collaboration”.

One of the key challenges is the overarching influence of donor-driven expectations. Donors, driven by a desire for efficiency, measurable outcomes, and quick results, often prioritize short-term achievements over long-term, sustainable impact. While these donor expectations are important, they can inadvertently push the networks away from their mission-driven goals, creating tension between fulfilling donor checklists and addressing the more complex, deeper needs of the target communities. This dynamic often leaves little room for the networks to engage in the kind of purpose-driven, long-term collaboration that would be beneficial for both the networks and their constituents.

Another critical issue is the operationalization of the JOP itself. Donor-driven requirements, according to our findings, may lead to rushed processes, such as the hurried production of joint reports⁹, which ultimately compromise the quality of the outputs. The pressure to deliver quickly undermines the networks' ability to leverage their collective expertise to address the complex issues they are meant to tackle. Rather than promoting a thoughtful, strategic collaboration, the networks may find themselves prioritizing speed over substance, which significantly reduces the potential for meaningful, impactful collaboration. This “superficial” approach can lead to inefficiency, dissatisfaction, and a lack of ownership among stakeholders, further worsening the challenges.

Moreover, misaligned priorities within the JOP can result in communication breakdowns and wasted resources. When one network focuses on professionalization while the other targets (institutional) capacity-building, their differing operational priorities can create confusion and inefficiency. This misalignment often results in tensions and frustration, with both networks spending more time managing internal conflicts than working towards shared goals. Such an outcome not only harms the effectiveness of the collaboration but also undermines the credibility of the networks as they struggle to meet expectations that may not align with their core missions.

For the JOP to evolve into a genuinely synergistic partnership, the focus must shift from fulfilling working together under the JOP to advancing a needs-based collaboration. A deeper and more intentional dialogue between the networks and the communities they serve is crucial for understanding the nuanced needs of the stakeholders and creating a partnership that surely aligns with these needs. This process would require a shift in how the networks engage with one another, with an emphasis on acknowledging and leveraging each network's unique strengths rather than forcing a one-size-fits-all approach. For example, among the four strategic areas of the JOB, most of the respondents agreed that GRFAS has made inroads in terms of professionalization and knowledge management while YPARD has been doing well in advocacy. Based on this, perhaps amplifying the voices within the networks that advocate for long-term, sustainable impact over short-term efficiency could help steer the collaboration in a more meaningful direction.

Based on our careful analysis, we conclude that the risk of collaboration under the JOP has become clear: while the JOP has potential, it is in danger of being shaped more by external expectations than by the real needs of the stakeholders.

⁹ We have read all the reports (201-2023). The reports prepared by the two networks come across not as a unified analysis and synthesis but rather as two separate sections—one dedicated to GFRAS and the other to YPARD—presented within a single document.

This dynamic could ultimately undermine the intended impact of the partnership. For the collaboration to succeed, the networks must find a balance between meeting requirements and staying true to their mission-driven objectives. Addressing their differing priorities and creating a more flexible, responsive partnership model will be key to ensuring the JOP's success.

Moving forward and reflecting on the feedback and challenges identified, it might be more effective for the networks to operate separately, at least in the short term, focusing on their objectives and strengths. Such an approach would allow each network to develop and implement strategies that align more closely with its core goals and target audience. Forced integration under the current structure might risk diluting the networks' effectiveness and credibility. Eventually, a more strategic, flexible approach to collaboration—whether through project-based partnerships or other mechanisms—could offer a more sustainable and impactful way forward.

5.3. Managing and Navigating Global, Regional, and Country Fora

GFRAS and YPARD have both expanded their influence on global discussions, positioning themselves as key players in addressing major global challenges, such as agricultural development and youth empowerment. Their efforts to align global priorities with local needs reflect their ambition to make a meaningful impact. However, this dual focus often creates tensions, as the realities of local contexts can conflict with broad, global goals.

The challenge lies in balancing these global ambitions with the specific needs and conditions at the regional and country levels. This misalignment can sometimes hinder their ability to execute effectively, as the strategies and solutions developed at the global level may not always resonate or be practical in local settings.

Both networks have adopted innovative models—GFRAS as a "network of networks" and YPARD as a "grassroots movement"—that promote collaboration across different levels. However, the voluntary nature of participation within these models introduces significant instability. While volunteer-driven engagement promotes a sense of shared purpose and enthusiasm, it lacks the consistency and accountability required to ensure coordinated efforts. The absence of formalized structures means that regional activities can become fragmented, and the level of engagement can vary significantly across different areas. This inconsistency impedes the networks' ability to present a unified approach and cohesively achieve their global goals.

Furthermore, GFRAS and YPARD face challenges in aligning global strategies with the diverse needs of different regions. While both networks are designed to advance collaboration and knowledge sharing, the lack of standardized practices and formal accountability mechanisms can lead to uneven performance. Regional chapters may implement different methods or face varying levels of support, which prevents the networks from realizing their full potential at a global scale. This operational misalignment highlights the complexity of implementing a global agenda that is adaptable to local realities without compromising on effectiveness.

The voluntary, flexible nature of these networks, while promoting innovation and adaptability, also creates risks. It makes it difficult to maintain long-term sustainability and consistent impact, as varying levels of commitment and resources across regions can undermine the networks' effectiveness. For these networks to succeed and have a lasting impact, they must find a way to strengthen their structures without losing the flexibility that makes them attractive to participants as well as other partners. This balance is crucial to ensuring that both GFRAS and YPARD can maintain their ability to adapt to local needs while working toward shared global goals.

The gist of the review's findings is while GFRAS and YPARD have made considerable strides in global discussions, their reliance on voluntary models without formal accountability mechanisms creates challenges in maintaining consistency and coordination. Their ability to balance global ambitions with local needs remains critical for long-term success. Addressing these structural challenges and enhancing coordination across regions will help ensure that both networks can continue to build on their strengths and achieve sustainable impact.

5.4. Understanding and Measuring Impact

Both GFRAS and YPARD have made significant progress in expanding their networks and increasing collaboration, meeting and even exceeding targets set in their Logical Frameworks.

GFRAS, for instance, successfully grew its number of partners from 5 to 10 by 2023, along with an increase in one-time partner support, which reflects a growing recognition of the importance of pluralistic and demand-driven RAS in promoting sustainable agricultural development.

In parallel, YPARD surpassed its target of 10 partners by reaching 39 by 2023. This expansion, combined with a significant increase in funding (with regional hubs' budgets growing to 1.6 million CHF), demonstrates increasing global support for youth-led agricultural innovations. These successes indicate growing institutional sustainability and a broadening of international support for both networks.

The key outcomes outlined in the Logical Framework further illustrate the networks' achievements. By 2023, 12 countries (target: 7) had passed gender-sensitive policies promoting RAS and youth, signaling positive policy reforms. The number of countries integrating gender and youth-sensitive E-Extension services grew from 5 to 21, while both GFRAS and YPARD exceeded their targets for knowledge exchange, with GFRAS producing more knowledge products and YPARD making significant progress in publications. Additionally, the number of active RAS Country Fora grew to 14, with these networks maturing into more sustainable, financially viable entities.

Achievements of the Logical Framework

Outcome 1: Increased Recognition of RAS and Youth. By 2023, 12 countries (target 7) passed gender-sensitive policies promoting RAS and youth. This reflects positive policy reforms and growing investments in these areas, with countries like South Africa, Uzbekistan, and Ecuador leading the way.

Outcome 2: Strengthened RAS Providers and Youth Performance. The number of countries integrating gender and youth-sensitive E-Extension grew from 5 to 21. More countries are developing training standards for RAS providers, and certification programs like NELK are helping professionalize the sector. YPARD's mentoring program and thematic task forces show increased youth engagement in agriculture.

Outcome 3: Enhanced Learning and Knowledge Exchange. GFRAS and YPARD exceeded targets for website views and document downloads. GFRAS created more knowledge products, while YPARD made progress in publications. Both networks are successfully leveraging digital platforms to engage stakeholders and foster knowledge-sharing.

Outcome 4: Functional and Financially Sustainable Networks. The number of active RAS Country Fora has grown, with 14 reaching maturity. These networks are becoming more sustainable, with increased private sector involvement, successful fundraising, and enhanced knowledge-sharing capabilities.

Despite these measurable achievements, linking them to broader system changes remains a complex challenge. Both GFRAS and YPARD aim to create shifts in agricultural practices, structures, and values, but quantifying their contribution to these systemic changes is not straightforward. For GFRAS, the promotion of inclusivity in RAS, the adoption of demand-driven approaches, and the promotion of cross-sectoral collaboration are crucial goals. Similarly, YPARD seeks to empower youth by involving them in decision-making processes, offering professional development opportunities, and establishing mentoring networks. However, the extent to which these efforts lead to lasting changes in practices and behaviors remains difficult to measure without a more robust M&E framework.

The challenge of evaluating structural changes is also significant. GFRAS aims to integrate decentralized platforms and data-driven decision-making processes, while YPARD seeks to strengthen global-to-local linkages and support youth-led initiatives. While these structural changes are essential for system transformation, their success depends on external factors such as stakeholder buy-in and the adaptability of existing governance frameworks. Without an effective M&E

framework, it is challenging to determine whether these interventions are progressing as intended or yielding the desired impact.

Moreover, measuring shifts in norms and values, such as gender inclusivity, youth empowerment, and respect for local knowledge, is especially difficult due to their deep entanglement with social and cultural systems. These transformative goals require long-term commitment and a nuanced understanding of cultural shifts, which existing M&E frameworks often fail to capture effectively.

To improve their impact measurement, both GFRAS and YPARD need to develop a practical, flexible, and context-appropriate M&E framework. These frameworks should be capable of tracking both small and large changes, ensuring they are responsive to the dynamic and evolving nature of their work. Involving stakeholders in setting indicators and measuring progress will be essential in capturing the scope of their impact. With such tools in place, the networks will be better equipped to monitor their effectiveness, adapt their strategies, and ultimately drive sustainable, long-term change in agricultural development and food systems transformation.

6. Recommendations and Future Directions

6.1. Overall Recommendations

The following sections present recommendations that prioritize feasible, low-tech, and practical solutions. These approaches account for funding constraints, local contexts, and the complexities faced by development organizations and networks like GFRAS and YPARD. Three key areas are central to shaping the future of the two networks: organizational governance and structural improvements; enhancing institutional and financial sustainability (exploring business models); and strengthening the generation and leveraging of impact.

Our recommendations highlight collaboration, localization, and inclusive decision-making as core principles. These principles aim to achieve impact that is inclusive, sustainable, and scalable. This review aligns with earlier suggestions focused on challenges, opportunities, and risks. To avoid repetition, we do not restate them here but rather focus on the three most critical areas.

The decision to focus on three key areas—organizational governance and structural improvements, enhancing institutional and financial sustainability, and strengthening impact generation—was driven by practical considerations and the specific challenges faced by GFRAS and YPARD. These priorities were chosen for the following reasons:

1. Organizational governance and structural improvements

- Operational effectiveness: Effective governance is essential for credibility, transparency, and accountability. Respondents highlighted issues like fragmented regional support, informal structures, and leadership transitions. Addressing these ensures smoother coordination and decision-making.
- Scalability and local relevance: Strong governance empowers regional networks to adapt to local needs, promoting ownership and responsiveness to agricultural challenges.

2. Enhancing institutional and financial sustainability

- Funding constraints: Over-reliance on donor funding and limited resources were major concerns. Diversifying funding through innovative models can address these while maintaining flexibility.
- Long-term stability: Financial planning embedded in strategies reduces vulnerabilities to fluctuating donor priorities, ensuring mission continuity.

3. Strengthening impact generation

- Measurable results: Tangible outcomes in youth engagement, climate resilience, and sustainable agriculture are critical. Impact measurement builds trust, attracts funding, and ensures relevance.

- Practical solutions: Focusing on low-tech, scalable interventions maximizes impact with limited resources, aligning with operational realities.

Why were these areas prioritized?

- Feasibility: The recommendations emphasize practical, resource-efficient solutions.
- Local adaptability: They address diverse global contexts in which GFRAS and YPARD operate.
- Strategic focus: By integrating governance, sustainability, and impact, these strategies enhance effectiveness without overburdening capacity.

6.1.2. Organizational Governance and Structural Improvements

To address the governance and sustainability challenges faced by GFRAS and YPARD, after careful deliberation, we recommend the strategic transition from a “volunteer-based model” to a “professional network model.” This shift will enhance operational effectiveness, reduce volunteer fatigue, and ensure that both networks are equipped to meet the growing complexity of agricultural development goals.

While this proposal may appear contradictory given that the “P” in YPARD stands for “Professional” and RAS aims to professionalize services, it is essential to clarify that we are not questioning the professional nature of the work. Instead, our critique lies in the way professional responsibilities are formulated and delivered within these two networks, which, unfortunately, remain largely voluntary and structurally fragile.

The rationale for the recommendation

1. Governance and coordination challenges: Effective governance is critical to maintaining stakeholder trust and achieving impact. While the networks’ grassroots approach promotes inclusivity, it also creates significant challenges in coordination and alignment across global, regional, and national levels. Our extensive exchanges with respondents showed that network members frequently struggle to balance their voluntary commitments with professional and personal responsibilities. This often leads to inconsistent engagement and, over time, “volunteer fatigue”. A professional network model can address these issues by ensuring continuity, accountability, and efficiency in governance structures.

2. Evolving demands in the agricultural sector: The agricultural sector is increasingly tasked with addressing complex, cross-cutting challenges such as climate change, gender equity, youth inclusion, and digital innovation. Meeting these demands requires coordinated actions that align with global frameworks like the SDGs while being tailored to local contexts. Current volunteer-driven coordination mechanisms struggle to deliver the level of responsiveness and adaptability required. Professionalizing key roles would provide the capacity needed to design and implement strategies that effectively navigate these complexities.



3. Resource and engagement constraints: Sustaining volunteer-driven networks is becoming more difficult, especially in the face of limited resources and growing responsibilities. Volunteers’ contributions, while valuable, often lack clear incentives, leading to disengagement over time. Transitioning to a professional model would not only reduce the burden on volunteers but also enable GFRAS and YPARD to attract and retain high-caliber talent dedicated to advancing the networks’ missions.

Justification for transitioning to a professional model

A professional network model offers multiple benefits:

- *Enhanced coordination:* Professional roles ensure smoother operations and alignment across different levels of the networks.
- *Sustained engagement:* Clear incentives and defined roles foster accountability and long-term commitment.
- *Strategic resilience:* A dedicated network base allows the networks to adapt more effectively to changing agricultural and development landscapes.

The starting point for a feasible and relevant transition from a "volunteer-based" to a "professional network" model is to define and refine the value proposition of the two networks. Based on the extensive discussions and exchanges with the respondents, we present below one example of clarifying or refining the value proposition statements for GFRAS and YPARD.

<div data-bbox="203 388 324 451">  </div> <div data-bbox="349 409 633 441"> <p><i>GFRAS value proposition</i></p> </div> <div data-bbox="203 457 1421 520"> <p>"Empowering inclusive and innovative rural advisory services globally to transform agriculture and rural livelihoods sustainably."</p> </div> <div data-bbox="203 541 397 573"> <p>Key components</p> </div> <div data-bbox="203 590 560 621"> <p>Global leadership and advocacy:</p> </div> <div data-bbox="203 638 1421 701"> <p>Act as the leading platform to advocate for the importance of rural advisory services in global development agendas, including climate resilience, gender equity, and sustainable food systems.</p> </div> <div data-bbox="203 718 462 749"> <p>Capacity development:</p> </div> <div data-bbox="203 766 1421 829"> <p>Provide (through partners) tailored tools, guidelines, and training programs to enhance the capacity of advisory services for meeting the evolving needs of farmers and rural communities.</p> </div> <div data-bbox="203 846 609 877"> <p>Networking and knowledge sharing:</p> </div> <div data-bbox="203 894 1421 957"> <p>Facilitate partnerships among national, regional, and global stakeholders, promoting the co-creation and exchange of best practices, innovations, and evidence-based strategies.</p> </div> <div data-bbox="203 974 430 1005"> <p>Inclusion and equity:</p> </div> <div data-bbox="203 1022 1421 1085"> <p>Champion inclusive and pluralistic advisory services that address the unique needs of women, youth, and marginalized groups to ensure equitable access to knowledge and resources.</p> </div> <div data-bbox="203 1102 568 1134"> <p>Evidence-based decision making:</p> </div> <div data-bbox="203 1150 1421 1213"> <p>Support the generation and dissemination of actionable research and data to inform policies and investments that strengthen rural advisory systems.</p> </div> <div data-bbox="203 1230 609 1262"> <p>Local solutions for global challenges:</p> </div> <div data-bbox="203 1278 1421 1341"> <p>Promote locally- and technology-driven solutions that align with global objectives, enabling rural advisory services to effectively tackle issues like climate-smart agriculture and sustainable development.</p> </div>	<div data-bbox="203 1386 324 1449">  </div> <div data-bbox="349 1381 641 1413"> <p><i>YPARD value proposition</i></p> </div> <div data-bbox="349 1430 1421 1493"> <p>"Inspiring and equipping the next generation of agricultural leaders to transform food systems and drive sustainable development."</p> </div> <div data-bbox="203 1514 397 1545"> <p>Key components</p> </div> <div data-bbox="203 1562 641 1593"> <p>1) Youth leadership and empowerment:</p> </div> <div data-bbox="251 1610 1421 1673"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Serve as a global platform to amplify the voices of young professionals and enhance their leadership in shaping the future of agriculture. </div> <div data-bbox="203 1690 755 1722"> <p>2) Capacity building and skills development:</p> </div> <div data-bbox="251 1738 1421 1801"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Offer tailored training, mentorship programs, and knowledge-sharing opportunities to equip youth with the skills and confidence to lead innovations in agriculture. </div> <div data-bbox="203 1818 641 1850"> <p>3) Networking and collaboration:</p> </div>
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- Create opportunities for young professionals to connect with peers, experts, and stakeholders across regions, enhancing cross-sectoral partnerships for sustainable agriculture.
- 4) *Advocacy and representation:***
 - Advocate for youth inclusion in decision-making processes at local, national, and global levels, ensuring their perspectives influence policies and programs.
- 5) *Innovation for sustainable agriculture:***
 - Promote and support innovative approaches, technologies, and entrepreneurial initiatives that address critical challenges like food security, climate resilience, and sustainability.
- 6) *Inclusion and diversity:***
 - Prioritize diversity by ensuring equitable participation of women, marginalized groups, and underrepresented communities in agriculture and related sectors.

6.1.2. Enhancing Institutional and Financial Sustainability: Exploring Business Models

Based on the value propositions, GFRAS and YPARD ever more need to diversify their funding to achieve long-term sustainability. Relying solely on donor funding is no longer viable in today's fast-changing global landscape of development cooperation. One of the most effective ways to diversify income is by exploring hybrid business models that combine "traditional" funding sources with newer, sustainable approaches. Impact investment, for example, offers the networks the chance to attract capital for projects that generate measurable social or environmental impact. This can be particularly beneficial for initiatives that focus on youth and agricultural development.

Additionally, the networks may explore fee-for-service models, where they charge for specialized consulting or advisory services. This could involve offering tailored training, mentorship programs, or research services to governments, NGOs, or private enterprises focused on sustainable agriculture. Furthermore, knowledge-based subscriptions, such as premium access to reports, webinars, or exclusive content, can provide a steady stream of income. One of the documents of YPARD,¹⁰ for example, states that "... approaches, like service provision, membership fees, selling goods or services, and crowdfunding, should not be expected to bring in core funding but could provide supplemental funding for additional projects." While we tend to agree, it is wise to combine such sources of income with mandates.

The relevance of these strategies is clear: GFRAS and YPARD are positioned to leverage their expertise and networks to offer value-added services to various stakeholders. The growing demand for practical knowledge in sustainable agriculture, especially in youth empowerment, creates a ripe opportunity to monetize these areas. Feasibility is also high as many organizations in the development sector are adopting similar models with success. The key will be to balance these revenue-generating activities with their core mission to avoid mission drift.

The following business models are suggested based on the exchanges with respondents as well as other similar practices. We foresee a combination of one or more of these business models to work for GFRAS and/or YPARD depending on the organizational capability (structure and process), leadership, resources (human and financial), and other factors. The global secretariate of GFARS should consult and understand which business models fit with regional networks and country fora.

¹⁰ YPARD 2024-2025 Funding Strategy.

Membership-based model



Description: Charge membership fees from individuals, institutions, and organizations who benefit from their services.



Revenue sources: Annual membership fees (individuals, organizations, etc.); tiered membership options with additional benefits for higher levels (e.g., access to exclusive content, events, etc.)



Value proposition: Members gain access to networking, resources, and capacity-building events, while the organization secures a steady revenue stream for community development.



Minimum requirements: A solid membership recruitment and retention strategy; infrastructure to manage membership databases and communications (e.g., a CRM system); a clear value proposition for members (e.g., events, resources, networking); regular engagement through newsletters, events, or training.



Risks: Low membership uptake or member churn; inconsistent revenue stream depending on membership renewals; difficulty in justifying membership benefits in a competitive market.



Risk mitigation: Offering diverse membership levels with varying benefits to cater to different target groups; providing exclusive and high-value services (e.g., networking opportunities, expert webinars); implementing a strong marketing and communication plan to attract new members and retain existing ones; regularly reviewing and enhancing member benefits based on feedback.

Donor-funded model



Description: Organizations rely on grants, donations, and sponsorships from governments, international organizations, foundations, or private donors.



Revenue sources: Grants from international development agencies or governments; sponsorship from private corporations or philanthropists; crowdfunding for specific projects.



Value proposition: Focused on projects that advance rural advisory services, agricultural research, and youth empowerment. It allows the organization to remain mission-driven and non-profit-focused.



Minimum requirements: Strong relationships with donors, government bodies, and private foundations; clear articulation of the organization's mission and measurable outcomes; strong proposal-writing and fundraising capacity; monitoring and evaluation systems to track the impact of funded projects.



Risks: Over-reliance on a limited number of donors or funding sources; donor fatigue or changing donor priorities leading to funding cuts; increased competition for donor funding.



Risk mitigation: Diversifying funding sources to include smaller and more sustainable grants or individual donations; developing long-term partnerships with donors through strategic alignment of missions; regularly reviewing and adapting the organization's funding strategy to meet changing donor interests; maintaining transparent reporting and showing the impact of funding to foster trust and renewal.

Service provision and consultancy model



Description: Offering advisory, training, and consultancy services to stakeholders in the agricultural and development sectors.



Revenue sources: Fees from consultancy services (e.g., strategic advisory, organizational development); customized training programs for organizations or governments; workshops, webinars, and events (paid or ticketed).



Value proposition: Providing expertise and knowledge in the form of training, resources, and specialized consulting. This model helps the networks generate income while fulfilling its mission of capacity-building.



Minimum requirements: Strong expertise in the organization's field (agriculture, rural advisory services, etc.); experienced professionals capable of delivering high-quality consulting services; well-developed branding and reputation in the industry; clear contractual agreements for service delivery, including pricing and scope.



Risks: Difficulty in attracting clients or maintaining a steady stream of consultancy work; over-dependence on a few key clients, creating financial instability; market saturation with other service providers offering similar services.



Risk mitigation: Offering a diverse range of services to different sectors within the agriculture and rural development fields; developing long-term relationships with clients, including follow-up services and retainer contracts; continuous market research to identify emerging needs or niche opportunities for consultancy; building a strong network of partnerships to increase business opportunities and referrals.

Platform and resource hub model



Description: Offering a platform that aggregates resources, data, publications, and tools for members and stakeholders in the agricultural and development sectors.



Revenue sources: Premium content subscriptions; selling access to databases or research findings; partnership with other organizations or businesses that want access to the platform's network.



Value proposition: The platform becomes a central hub for knowledge sharing, collaboration, and resource access for professionals in rural development and agriculture.



Minimum requirements: A well-designed and user-friendly digital platform (website, mobile app); a strong content management system to regularly update resources, publications, and tools; strong partnerships with knowledge providers and institutions; data security and privacy compliance to protect users' information.



Risks: Low user engagement with the platform or lack of relevant content; high costs in developing and maintaining the platform; competition from larger or more established knowledge-sharing platforms.



Risk mitigation: Regularly updating content and creating high-quality resources that address users' needs; implementing a feedback loop to improve the platform's features and usability; partnering with other organizations to enhance platform value and broaden content offerings; offering premium content or services to create additional revenue streams and justify the platform's maintenance costs.

Collaborative research and innovation partnerships model



Description: Partnering with academic institutions, development agencies, and private businesses to co-develop research projects and innovative solutions in RAS and youth engagement and empowerment.



Revenue sources: Research funding from governments, universities, and industry partners; joint ventures or co-branded products (e.g., publications, toolkits, reports); commissioned research or evaluations by external organizations.



Value proposition: Provides valuable research and innovations that address pressing issues in rural advisory services and agriculture, benefiting both partners and members.



Minimum requirements: Strong research capacity, including access to expertise, tools, and infrastructure; clear agreement structures with partners on roles, deliverables, and funding; systems for tracking research progress and outcomes; strong relationship-building skills for successful partnerships.



Risks: Misalignment of goals or expectations among research partners; delays in research timelines or failure to meet milestones; limited ability to secure long-term funding for large-scale research projects.



Risk mitigation: Clear, transparent agreements at the start of partnerships that outline roles, responsibilities, and timelines; regular check-ins with partners to monitor progress and adjust project plans as needed; diversifying funding sources by applying for multiple research grants or entering joint ventures with businesses; building relationships with a range of stakeholders to ensure stable collaboration and innovation.

6.1.3. Strengthening and Leveraging Impact

To maintain relevance and accountability, GFRAS and YPARD will need to continuously evaluate and strengthen their impact. This requires a systematic approach to measuring outcomes and ensuring their initiatives are effectively addressing community needs. M&E frameworks are important to enhance the integration of digital technologies.

Digital-driven analytics, for instance, provides real-time insights into project performance, enabling the networks to make data-driven adjustments quickly.

Digital tools such as data visualization platforms can make it easier for stakeholders to track progress. Interactive dashboards could display key performance indicators, enabling GFRAS and YPARD to communicate their impact more transparently and effectively. Additionally, gamification techniques could be employed to engage stakeholders, particularly youth, in the monitoring process. By incorporating elements like rewards and challenges, these tools could boost participation and commitment, stimulating a sense of ownership and involvement.

This recommendation is highly relevant as it ensures that GFRAS and YPARD remain accountable and transparent. The integration of digital tools not only enhances impact measurement but also broadens their reach, making their work more visible globally. These technologies also offer the potential for real-time feedback, allowing the networks to fine-tune their strategies and adapt to changing conditions. From a feasibility standpoint, the necessary tools are becoming more accessible and affordable, and GFRAS and YPARD already possess the networks and expertise to implement such solutions effectively.

The following table provides concrete and relevant ways for proving (accountability), improving (steering), and learning objectives of the M&E framework for the evidence-informed decision-making process by the two networks.

Table 2: M&E Framework for proving and improving

Key Areas for Strengthening and Leveraging Impact	Particulars	Recommendation	Relevance/Feasibility	Assigned to
Strengthen M&E using proven frameworks	Build on established practices like the DCED Standard to measure and monitor impacts.	Train staff and youth members to apply the DCED Standard in evaluating outcomes such as employment, income, and inclusion.	Highly relevant and feasible	Global Secretariat (develop frameworks), Regional Networks (implement training)
		Adapt and simplify tools to fit YPARD and GFRAS' capacities, focusing on qualitative and quantitative indicators.	Highly relevant, moderately feasible	Global Secretariat (adapt tools), Regional Networks (dissemination), Country Fora (implementation)
		Use frameworks to complement digital tools (Google Forms, KoBoToolbox) for data collection and analysis.	Highly relevant and feasible	Regional Networks (implementation), Country Fora (local application)
Use visual dashboards for better communication	Develop simple, affordable dashboards to communicate progress and impact.	Combine DCED-aligned data with tools like Google Data Studio or Excel for summaries.	Highly relevant, moderately feasible	Global Secretariat (design templates), Country Fora (usage)
		Share dashboards regularly with partners, funders, and youth members through newsletters, websites, and social media.	Moderately relevant and feasible	Regional Networks (dissemination), Country Fora (localized sharing)
Engage youth through simple activities	Integrate participatory approaches to involve youth in monitoring and learning.	Organize storytelling or photo challenges where youth document project impacts.	Highly relevant, highly feasible	Country Fora (execution), Regional Networks (support and coordination)
		Use DCED's emphasis on qualitative evidence to guide participatory activities.	Moderately relevant, moderately feasible	Regional Networks (guidance), Country Fora (application)
		Recognize contributions with rewards like certificates or shoutouts.	Highly relevant, highly feasible	Country Fora (implementation)

Build capacity with targeted training	Provide practical training on the DCED Standard and related tools.	Partner with DCED experts or organizations experienced in its application to deliver workshops.	Highly relevant, moderately feasible	Global Secretariat (partnership coordination), Regional Networks (training delivery)
		Focus on topics such as selecting indicators, data collection methods, and applying digital tools.	Highly relevant, highly feasible	Regional Networks (training), Country Fora (application)
Enhance communication using existing practices	Showcase impact stories aligned with DCED indicators.	Share updates on how projects align with DCED results, supported by data and success stories.	Highly relevant, moderately feasible	Global Secretariat (impact alignment), Country Fora (story generation)
		Use visual dashboards and youth-generated content to amplify results online.	Moderately relevant, moderately feasible	Regional Networks (amplification), Country Fora (content creation)

Notes:

- **Global Secretariat:** Focuses on adapting and aligning frameworks and securing partnerships for high-level capacity building.
- **Regional Networks:** Acts as intermediaries for training, dissemination, and support in using tools and frameworks.
- **Country Fora:** Executes localized activities, such as youth engagement and application of tools for data collection and communication.

6.2. Specific Recommendations

These recommendations build on the findings and topics discussed in the preceding sections. They are directed primarily to SDC as the main donor, as well as to the GFRAS and YPARD secretariats as key stakeholders. By extension, the recommendations also apply to other partners and stakeholders associated with and working alongside these two networks.

6.2.1. SDC's Future Engagement

Given the current financial constraints in development cooperation, it is essential to adopt a strategic approach to support the networks of GFRAS and YPARD, both of which have demonstrated significant value in promoting knowledge-sharing, supporting system changes, and strengthening the global-local linkages in the agricultural development sector. Below are recommendations that balance the need for financial prudence with the critical role these networks play in global development.

Acknowledge the critical value of GFRAS and YPARD

Both networks are central to facilitating an inclusive, and sustainable agricultural development agenda. GFRAS, with its focus on strengthening agricultural extension systems, and YPARD, with its work in engaging young professionals, are key assets in promoting innovation, knowledge transfer, and the inclusion of young voices in decision-making processes. Despite the challenges, these networks have successfully built momentum and established the foundation for long-term system changes—in terms of practices and behaviors, processes and structures, and norms and values. Discontinuing support at this juncture could risk disrupting these networks' global-local impact, which is vital for addressing ongoing and future challenges in the agriculture sector.

Link to systemic and long-term goals

While financial resources are limited, SDC should recognize the strategic alignment between the objectives of GFRAS and YPARD and the broader goals of international development, including inclusive development, youth empowerment, and resilience in agricultural systems. Both networks have shown tangible outcomes in promoting these areas. Supporting them would reinforce SDC's broader mission of strengthening global development initiatives, particularly in regions where agricultural extension systems and youth involvement are key to transformative change. If this is an

option, we also suggest focusing on a few of the JOP— for example, advocacy for YPARD and professionalization and knowledge management for GFRAS.

Leverage innovative business models

The current financial challenges present an opportunity to explore and implement innovative business models for the two networks. GFRAS and YPARD have already demonstrated their ability to generate knowledge, create partnerships, and deliver impact at multiple levels. To ensure their sustainability, SDC should encourage the networks to diversify their funding sources, explore revenue-generating initiatives, and build partnerships with the private sector, foundations, and international organizations. As presented in Section 5, this could include, in addition to proactive investment to attract mandates, fee-for-service models, membership subscriptions, or specialized training offerings, ensuring the networks continue to create value even in the absence of substantial donor funding.

Consider phased or conditional support

In light of financial limitations, SDC could consider offering phased or conditional support to GFRAS and YPARD. This approach allows for continued support in the short – to mid-term while emphasizing the need for the networks to adapt, innovate, and identify sustainable funding options. This could include providing support for specific key activities, such as capacity-building workshops, knowledge-sharing platforms, or initiatives that align closely with SDC’s strategic priorities while encouraging the networks to focus on securing additional funding in parallel.

Strengthen monitoring, evaluation, and impact measurement with strategic alliance with other players

To ensure continued effectiveness and accountability, SDC’s support should include a right-sized and functional M&E framework that tracks the progress of GFRAS and YPARD’s initiatives. By demonstrating their impact in real terms— such as improved agricultural extension services, youth engagement in agricultural policy, or increased resilience in target regions—these networks will be better positioned to attract additional funding and support. An evidence-based approach will also enable SDC to assess whether continued investment is yielding the desired outcomes. For this reason, we recommend a more focused and purpose-driven alliance between one or two of the networks with academic and research institutions both in Europe and/or in the different regions/countries.

Maximize synergies with other initiatives

By synergy, we mean (a) reducing duplication (enhancing efficiency), (b) leveraging, and (c) learning. SDC should consider how to integrate support for GFRAS and YPARD into broader agricultural development or youth empowerment initiatives. By aligning with complementary programs or initiatives within SDC’s portfolio, the impact of both networks could be enhanced. This approach would enable GFRAS and YPARD to benefit from synergies, avoid duplication of efforts, and leverage existing resources more effectively.

6.2.2. GFRAS Leadership

Enhance the network’s setup: The Global Secretariat should take the lead in developing a clear business model that defines the network’s purpose and member roles, ensuring strategic coordination across global and regional actors. This model should include strengthening communication strategies and mentorship practices to foster collaboration and a shared sense of purpose. Additionally, the Global Secretariat should establish cross-sector innovation hubs linking advisors, policymakers, and academics to drive innovation and capacity building without significantly expanding the core team. The Regional Networks will focus on implementing the distributed team model, outsourcing tasks to regional consultants and experts, and enhancing regional collaboration. The National Fora will ensure local adaptation and execution of these efforts (Reference sections: 4.2.A; 4.3.C.; 4.4.A; 4.4.D; 5.1).

Assigned to:

- **Global Secretariat:** Overarching coordination, business model development, innovation hubs
- **Regional Networks:** Execution of distributed team model, regional mentorship

- **National Fora:** Local collaboration and implementation

Strengthen partnerships: The Global Secretariat should formalize partnerships by defining roles, joint initiatives, and a compelling value proposition that highlights GFRAS' unique contributions. This formalization should articulate the "additionality" of GFRAS, aligning expectations for sustainable, mutually beneficial collaborations. Regional Networks will be responsible for engaging with regional actors, facilitating partnership discussions, and ensuring regional relevance. The National Fora will work to align local partners with the broader vision and execute these collaborations on the ground (Reference sections: 4.2.B.; 4.2.C).

Assigned to:

- **Global Secretariat:** Strategic coordination and partnership formalization
- **Regional Networks:** Engaging regional actors, defining roles
- **National Fora:** Local partner alignment and execution

Diversify funding: The Global Secretariat should invest in a business development manager to map out and secure larger, sustainable funding sources. This includes cultivating stronger donor relationships and developing compelling proposals. In addition, the Secretariat should explore funding opportunities such as a Climate Resilience Fund, AgTech partnerships, and public-private dialogues. Regional Networks will help coordinate funding initiatives and partnerships at the regional level. National Fora should support local-level crowdfunding and partner with stakeholders to secure resources in their respective countries (Reference sections: 4.2.C.; 4.3.D.; 4.4.C; 5.2).

Assigned to:

- **Global Secretariat:** Business development, securing global funding
- **Regional Networks:** Regional coordination of funding initiatives
- **National Fora:** Local-level crowdfunding and partnership management

Enhance position as a global RAS leader: The Global Secretariat should focus on strengthening collaboration and coordination among RAS initiatives to minimize duplication and position GFRAS as a central hub for synergies in the RAS landscape. This will involve leveraging its global reach, expertise, and leadership. Regional Networks should focus on creating synergies at the regional level, promoting collaboration, and ensuring that local actors align with global strategies. National Fora will implement synergies and share best practices locally, contributing to the global efforts (Reference sections: 4.1.C.; 4.2.D.; 5.1).

Assigned to:

- **Global Secretariat:** Coordination and leadership of global RAS synergies
- **Regional Networks:** Regional synergy creation and collaboration
- **National Fora:** Local implementation of synergies and best practices

Develop impact measurement framework: The Global Secretariat should invest in a functional M&E framework to systematically track outputs, outcomes, and impacts. This will involve collaborating with specialized partners to implement the system, ensuring strong accountability and improved data collection for evidence-based decision-making. Regional Networks will coordinate M&E activities at the regional level, ensuring alignment with the global framework. National Fora will focus on local M&E implementation and reporting, ensuring data collection is relevant and actionable at the national level (Reference sections: 4.2.E.; 5.3).

Assigned to:

- **Global Secretariat:** Framework development and global partnerships for M&E
- **Regional Networks:** Regional M&E coordination
- **National Fora:** Local-level M&E implementation and reporting

Strengthen academic collaboration: In the short term, the Global Secretariat should partner with academic institutions to produce policy briefs on climate-resilient and tech-enabled RAS. In the medium term, the Secretariat should focus on piloting digital tools and capacity-building initiatives for advisory providers. Over the long term, the Secretariat should advocate for policy changes to integrate digital platforms and climate resilience into national frameworks. Regional Networks will work on medium-term pilot programs and capacity-building efforts, while the National Fora will advocate for policy integration and academic collaboration at the national level (Reference sections: 4.2.B.; 4.3.A).

Assigned to:

- **Global Secretariat:** Policy briefs, advocacy, and long-term academic collaboration
- **Regional Networks:** Medium-term pilots and capacity building
- **National Fora:** National-level policy advocacy and academic partnerships

Reinforce regional networks and national fora: The Global Secretariat should facilitate “South-South” knowledge exchange to share best practices among regional actors, advancing locally adapted solutions to global challenges. The Secretariat will also implement a “shared leadership” model within regional networks and facilitate the launch of a digital platform for resource sharing. Regional Networks will focus on establishing and managing a “regional resilience fund” to crowdsource contributions from local stakeholders, ensuring financial autonomy and regional ownership. National Fora will contribute to knowledge exchange and resilience fund efforts at the local level. (Reference sections: 4.2.D.; 4.3.C.; 4.4.E).

Assigned to:

- **Global Secretariat:** Facilitation of knowledge exchange, shared leadership model
- **Regional Networks:** Digital platform management, resilience fund implementation
- **National Fora:** Local knowledge exchange and fund contributions

Bolster credibility: The Global Secretariat should implement an “open governance” system with publicly accessible partnership criteria and ethical guidelines. The Secretariat should adopt practices like the “Kampala principles” and engage third-party audits for impartiality. It should also leverage technologies for real-time transparency in funding and partnerships. Regional Networks will help implement these governance practices in their regions, ensuring transparency and accountability. National Fora will adhere to governance standards and support local-level transparency efforts (Reference sections: 4.2.E.; 5.1.; 5.3).

Assigned to:

- **Global Secretariat:** Governance implementation, third-party audits
- **Regional Networks:** Regional governance and transparency efforts
- **National Fora:** Local transparency and ethical guidelines adherence

6.2.3. YPARD Leadership

Strengthen organizational setup and processes: YPARD should formalize its organizational structure by (re)defining leadership roles and establishing clearer governance frameworks. A “virtual leadership toolkit” should be developed to standardize transitions and onboarding. Additionally, a dedicated team should be formed to map strategic opportunities, engage potential partners, and communicate YPARD’s unique value. This will improve organizational clarity, streamline operations, and enhance YPARD’s appeal as a credible partner for investment (reference section: 4.4.A.; 4.4.D.).

Diversify resource mobilization for sustainability: Adopt a multi-layered resource mobilization strategy, building partnerships with international donors, the private sector, and other global initiatives for core funding. These partnerships should also promote knowledge exchange and co-branded initiatives. Invest in a resource mobilization team or consultant to craft proposals and explore innovative financing, such as public-private partnerships, ensuring YPARD's financial stability and long-term impact (reference section: 4.2.A.; 4.4.C.; 5.2.).

Improve communication and coordination: Create localized communication strategies for each chapter, offering training to navigate cross-cultural and institutional differences. Invest in adaptable tools that support multilingual collaboration and varying levels of technology access. A flexible, centralized communication framework will ensure alignment with YPARD's vision while allowing chapters to operate effectively. This approach will boost efficiency, strengthen the community, and enable more meaningful global collaboration (reference section: 4.2.B.; 4.5.3.D.).

Develop impact measurement framework: Invest in a functional M&E framework to track outputs, outcomes, and impacts systematically. Collaborate with specialized partners to implement this system, ensuring strong accountability and improved data collection for evidence-based decision-making and advocacy (reference section: 5.3.).

Better leverage mentoring resources: Enhance awareness campaigns to promote the benefits of mentoring kits to both current and potential users. These kits should be integrated into broader capacity-building programs to position them as key tools for developing young leaders in agriculture. Partnering with local organizations to tailor the kits to regional needs will ensure greater relevance and impact. For example, including targeted modules for agripreneurship challenges like market access or climate change adaptation will make the kits more practical and accessible (reference section: 4.1.C.; 4.2.C.).

Recalibrate youth participation in agriculture: YPARD is well-positioned to shift the narrative by focusing on systemic issues and developing mentorship programs connecting youth with successful agricultural entrepreneurs, showcasing agriculture as an innovative and entrepreneurial field. These relationships will provide guidance, resources, and networks to make the sector more accessible. Additionally, strengthening peer networks and platforms for sharing experiences in areas like urban farming and agri-tech will promote community and inspire youth to see agriculture as a dynamic, forward-thinking career path (reference section: 4.1.D.; 4.2.D.).

Leverage strategically YPARD’s grassroots network: YPARD's strength lies in its deep connections with over 32,000 youth in agriculture across multiple countries, providing valuable insights into local needs and innovations. This grassroots network is key to identifying successful country-level initiatives that can be scaled and adapted globally. Mechanisms include leveraging local knowledge, strengthening its volunteer base through capacity-building programs, and mobilizing young leaders. YPARD is well-positioned to shift localized successes into impactful regional (and even global solutions), further influencing policies and promoting knowledge exchange (reference section: 4.3.B.).

Drive successes in policy advocacy: Advocacy has been one of the successes of YPARD. By facilitating local consultations, highlighting successful youth-led initiatives, and forming strategic partnerships with key stakeholders, YPARD can effectively influence policy at local, regional, and global levels. Despite resource challenges, YPARD should maximize its existing platforms and alliances (including enhancing digital skills and creating a knowledge-sharing platform for collaboration) to drive systemic change in sustainable agriculture policies (reference sources: 4.1.B.; 4.3.C.; 4.4.B.).

7. Conclusion

Both GFRAS and YPARD have played crucial roles in advancing rural advisory services and empowering youth in agriculture, addressing key challenges such as food security, climate change, and poverty. GFRAS has made significant strides by strengthening regional networks, such as RELASER and AFAAS, which enable cross-country learning and

promote collaborations among governments, NGOs, and local communities. Its capacity-building initiatives, such as the NELK and the Agroecology Education and Rural Advisory Services program, have empowered rural advisory service providers to tackle issues like gender equality and climate resilience. GFRAS also prioritizes youth inclusion, equipping young professionals with the skills and leadership opportunities needed to address the future challenges of agriculture.

YPARD, likewise, has been a driving force in empowering youth to lead in agriculture. Through programs like Youth Action for Climate Change, it has built the skills, knowledge, and networks necessary for young professionals to take on leadership roles in the agricultural sector. YPARD has successfully created global youth networks and formed partnerships with key organizations like FAO. These partnerships, along with the development of digital tools, have enhanced access to agricultural advice and mentorship, thereby improving the productivity and resilience of youth farmers. Furthermore, YPARD's advocacy efforts ensure that youth perspectives are represented in policy discussions, helping to create more inclusive decision-making processes on global issues like agriculture and climate change.

Despite these successes, both networks face significant challenges that could hinder their long-term impact. GFRAS is grappling with issues such as network cohesion, unclear communication, and reliance on short-term funding. These challenges undermine its strategic goals and lead to inefficiencies within the RAS sector. Similarly, YPARD faces fragmentation within its global network, which sometimes hampers its advocacy efforts. Both networks also struggle with securing sustainable funding, which is critical for continuing their work. To address these challenges, GFRAS and YPARD will need to strengthen their governance structures, formalize partnerships, and diversify their funding sources. This includes exploring new models of resource mobilization such as hybrid business models, fee-for-service initiatives, and knowledge-based subscriptions.

Additionally, both organizations need to modernize their digital strategies and adopt more professional network models to enhance coordination, reduce volunteer fatigue, and ensure greater accountability. Shifting from a volunteer-based to a professional model would allow the networks to better respond to the increasingly complex demands of the agricultural sector. Strengthening M&E frameworks will also be essential for tracking their progress and ensuring accountability.

Looking forward, diversifying funding sources will be critical for both GFRAS and YPARD. They should explore new avenues like impact investment, partnerships with the private sector, and membership-based models that align with their core missions. These strategies will not only reduce dependence on traditional donors but also help secure the financial sustainability necessary to scale their efforts and achieve long-term impact. Both networks should also focus on low-tech, scalable interventions that can deliver measurable change, particularly in areas like youth engagement, climate resilience, and sustainable agriculture.

For SDC, supporting these networks remains essential for achieving long-term development goals in agriculture. SDC should consider strategic support mechanisms, such as phased or conditional funding while encouraging GFRAS and YPARD to diversify their funding sources. Strengthening their M&E frameworks will ensure that SDC's support maximizes synergies with other development initiatives. By reinforcing governance, improving funding models, and focusing on high-impact areas like youth and climate resilience, GFRAS and YPARD can continue to play highly important roles in shaping the future of agriculture.

