

Jr/Sr twinning

Flash-news

“FILLING THE INTER-GENERATIONAL GAP IN KNOWLEDGE ON AGRICULTURAL WATER MANAGEMENT: TWINNING JUNIOR AND SENIOR EXPERTS” a pilot mentoring project by IFAD’s Initiative for Mainstreaming Innovation (IMI)

Turkish delight: ICID’s 1st World Irrigation Forum, the end of a forward-looking learning journey



The Jr/Sr twinning officially ended in October 2013 leaving behind the contagious enthusiasm of its first batch of Junior participants and a vibrant buzz in the stakeholders arena. Time to scale this up?

The Jr/Sr twinning project ended officially in October with the participation of all project beneficiaries in the **First World Irrigation Forum** in Mardin, Turkey. All mentoring programmes took place between February and September and the Turkish mission represented an excellent moment to formally round off this pilot capacity building initiative, gathering Junior and Senior Experts from the 5 target countries for a week of knowledge sharing, networking and evaluation of what has been achieved over the past year.

On the occasion of this high profile forum, IFAD organized a dedicated **side-event** on inter-generational cooperation and capacity development for water and food security to capitalize

on the favourable momentum surrounding youth issues, and advocate the solutions that have been successfully applied to stimulate further policy dialogue. The side event was very well received thanks to its ‘out-of-the-box’ nature and the lively “World Café style” interaction with senior AWM professionals in the audience. The 14 Junior Experts proved to be able to effectively make the best out of their participation in the WIF and their presence significantly helped to put the ‘who’ issue squarely on the ICID map. As evidenced by the keynote address at the closing ceremony delivered by one of the African young professionals, and the Mardin Declaration adopted by the 1st WIF - clearly referring to the role of farmers and young professionals - **IFAD efforts** were officially recognized.



YOUTH PARTICIPATION MATTERS

At the end of the WIF, Fethia Ahmed, one of IFAD’s Junior Experts, was invited by the Secretary general of ICID to deliver a short speech during the closing ceremony. Taking the stage, the 24 years old water governance expert in the making addressed the audience with a powerful and inspiring talk. “Inviting early career professionals from the South to international fora and giving them a platform to speak up not only responds to principles of fairer inclusion, but represents an invaluable opportunity to stimulate dialogue and enrich the expertise pool, building bridges with the future”.

Junior/Senior twinning in action in Turkey

During the side event's interactive session, the audience was given the opportunity to experience first-hand what the Jr/Sr twinning is about by working in group with IFAD's country teams on the elaboration of potential strategies to address agricultural water management challenges faced by the Junior Experts in their respective regions.



Working group 1: Ghana team



Working group 3: Ethiopia team



Working group 4: Malawi team



Working group 2: Gambia/Burkina Faso team

SHARING KNOWLEDGE

POOLING EXPERTISE

FINDING SOLUTIONS

Working group 1 - Ghana team on the introduction of butternut squash as a government strategy to increase farmers income and diversify the sources of livelihoods in the Northern Region.

Working group 2 - Gambia/Burkina Faso on the pollution of river courses caused by illegal mining sites started by migrant workers.

Working Group 3 - Ethiopia on building the capacity of local Ethiopian communities, farmers and water users associations.

Working group 4 - Malawi on how to give sustainability to water infrastructures after donor-funded projects end.



Brainstorming for innovative youth advocacy strategies

The side even offered an excellent opportunity to share ideas on how the international community can create more synergies to nurture the next generation of water leaders

Participants agreed on the fact that a sustainable strategy to youth inclusion will have to pass from more decisive efforts towards the following key actions:

- Knowledge sharing on effective incentive and reward systems to attract and engage young AWM professionals.
- More international visibility to innovative initiatives that target young promising Junior Professionals from the South.
- Awareness raising around the need to invest in inter-generational cooperation as a powerful and effective means to improve water management in agriculture.



Dr. Tyagi, secretary general of ICID, at the end of IFAD's side event

Voices of the protagonists

The Turkish gathering represented an excellent moment to share some first reflections after the end of the Jr/Sr twinning. Being a pilot mentoring initiative, the project was developed with the aim of testing a methodology and demonstrating that mentoring is a viable strategy to fill the inter-generational gap in AWM knowledge. Throughout its entire implementation continuous efforts were made to build up a culture of transparency between the beneficiaries and the IMI coordination, trying to develop effective modus operandi that fully responded to the needs of the target beneficiaries. Reviewing and evaluating the first round of mentoring together with the Junior and Senior Experts who were directly involved was therefore a crucial step towards a full understanding of the program's strengths and weaknesses in view of the potential scaling up initiatives.

“I LIKED THE JR/SR TWINNING BECAUSE...”

A collection of some success factors as expressed by the protagonists themselves

- ...it gives **exposure**: “We have been recognized as valuable professionals and appreciated for our expertise, we networked and expanded our future employment opportunities.”
- ...it contributes to **redefine the traditional role** assigned to early career professionals from the South: “It was great to step into the international arena for a high profile conference on water and food and to see our opinions recognized as valuable.”
- ...it creates an **innovative learning approach**: “What I liked the most was the tailored nature of the twinning, it really went beyond traditional trainings. The Personal Development Plan pushed me to focus and define my activities and now I can see my career path much more clearly”
- ...it has an **on field non-academic nature**: “The Jr/Sr twinning allowed Junior and Senior experts to discuss and explore AWM issues at very practical level, and to experience first-hand the reality of the ground. To me this was the best aspect as I had the opportunity to see with my eyes what really happens in the countryside on the fields”
- ...it makes people **think out of the box**: “Interacting with the communities, learning from other Juniors' expertise, allowed me to familiarize with aspects of AWM I did not know, giving me a better understanding of the full picture”
- ...it generates a **multi country knowledge sharing** environment: “I liked the fact the we could get in contact with other young professionals working on AWM in other parts of Africa. It is enriching to be part of a broader movement and share our experiences.”
- ...it enhances **communication skills and confidence**: “The twinning enabled me to improve my ability to interact with various actors and stakeholders at multiple level, sharing my inputs on the implementation of existing projects, presenting my ideas to colleagues and mentors, and writing reports. It also strengthened my passion and enthusiasm for AWM.”
- ...it gives **courage**: “Now I know I can make it.”
- ...it **empowers**: “I want to be in the position to help my country. The Jr/Sr twinning allowed me to do so.”
- ...it provides a platform where **links between the research domain and the reality of the ground** can be built up: “I liked that we could move away from the academic domain, finding a common ground between the needs of the farmers and what we usually read and write in papers”
- ...It allows participants to **get in contact with farmers**: “It's an amazing opportunity to understand what it means for local communities. Not just to collect data and materials for our researches but especially to interact with farmers and actually talk with them”
- ...it fills the gap between **young professionals, senior professionals, project management units, communities, and donors**: “Bringing together different actors, the programme builds understanding and lays the ground for more participative and inclusive decision making processes. It is an invaluable opportunity to understand how other people think in consideration of their position. In this sense the Jr/Sr twinning really helped me to move away from being too critical with PMUs”
- ...it builds **relationships that work**: “At the end of the day, mentoring is about friendship” - “Having an older person to talk to, having a guide and somebody who cares about your personal growth really is the value added”



What's next? Capitalizing on this success story

More and increasing efforts are needed to unlock the potential of the future water leaders

The Jr/Sr has been a wake up call for **investments targeting Young Career Professionals from the South**, giving visibility to the enormous potential of working with the new generations to build up local capacity and lower the external dependency in knowledge. The effectiveness of initiatives of this kind is even more striking when we look at the current lack of well-established methodologies for **continuous knowledge transfer between generations** of professionals. As increasing numbers of senior AWM experts edge closer to retirement, the entire water sector is in serious need of new and innovative strategies to protect knowledge from walking out the door.

The Jr/Sr twinning represented a successful exercise of inter-generational knowledge transfer, demonstrating the beneficial impacts of bringing together actors at different levels and making them cooperate. The diverse nature and multiple determinants of the problem of youth inclusion in AWM gives a key role to **multi-sectorial collaboration** between local universities, Project Management Units, senior expertise holders, and donors. Exploring new forms of partnerships and collaborations between all actors in the water sector is a crucial step to benefit of their synergic cooperation and elaborate integrated interventions.

Finally, although the Jr/Sr twinning was a powerful capacity building exercise at individual level, empowering local young AWM experts to strengthen their expertise and establish themselves as valuable professionals, in order to address the broader causes of youth sub-optimal inclusion in labour markets and decision making processes, **additional capacity building efforts are needed at institutional and systemic level**. There is a great need to redefine the social and economic value that is currently attached to Junior Experts from the South. In order to successfully achieve this long term goal, changes at the level of young people must be mirrored by changes at the level of the international community, the local societies and the states through the promotion and creation of an enabling environment for sustainable youth development.



THE GREAT POTENTIAL FOR A PHASE TWO

The participation in the WIF, as well as in the Stockholm Water Week and the various conferences and workshops over the past year, brought to light an **enormous demand** for capacity building initiatives targeting early career professionals. Very meagre opportunities exist at the moment for promising young talents from the South wishing to pursue a career in the water sector in their respective countries. For this reason a wide range of organizations and stakeholders in the water and agric sector have showed **great interest** in the innovative nature of the Jr/Sr twinning project, recognizing its ground breaking nature and the big potential for scaling-up the initiative. All efforts are now concentrated on **partnerships and resources mobilization** for a second round of mentoring, with a refined approach and a broader outreach - led by the South, for the South.