

Female Students at the University of Agriculture in Faisalabad (UAF), Pakistan: Summary

Student project in the frame of the B.Sc. course in Organic Agriculture at the University of Kassel, Germany, supported by the International Center for Development and Decent Work (ICDD), supervised by Prof. Dr. Béatrice Knerr und Prof. Dr. Muhammad Iqbal Zafar, carried out in May and June 2010 by Marie-Luise Hertkorn.

1 Aim of the study

This student project was carried out in order to inform the facilitation of exchange between the Universities of Faisalabad and Kassel. To this end, first, the reasons why female students at UAF study in agricultural courses were investigated. Second, the special requirements of Pakistani female students at UAF as regards studies abroad were explored. Between May and June 2010, 300 semi-structured questionnaires answered by female bachelor students enrolled at UAF were analyzed, containing questions regarding family backgrounds, study motivations, career plans and studies abroad.

2 Findings

2.1 Studying agriculture: family backgrounds, study motivations and career plans

Family backgrounds

The majority of respondents (69%) grew up in a town. 31% are from the countryside, and 7% grew up on a farm. 16% of the respondents' fathers pursue an agricultural profession, including both farmers and agricultural officers.

Study motivations

The reasons ranked highest among the respondents' study motivations were interest in the subject (19%), altruistic reasons such as improving the lives of Pakistani people (13%), and good job opportunities (10%). 9% indicated their agricultural family background as a study motivation. Three female students said they intended to cultivate their own farm. 5% indicated to have no study motivation at all.

Almost all respondents (98%) were advised by their parents to gain a university degree. 45% were told to study agriculture; 20% had free choice as regards their choice of study. A great majority was very satisfied (38%) or satisfied (59%) with studying in the field of agriculture. Likewise, most of the respondents were satisfied with how UAF implemented the agricultural courses (24% very satisfied, 66% satisfied).

Career plans

Most of the respondents (90%) aim for a master's degree. The most favored specializations are Food Science and Technology (31%), Plant Breeding and Genetics, and Biotechnology (9%). 55% aspire a doctoral degree, and likewise, 55% intend to pursue a profession within the university framework (both science and teaching).

Most of the respondents (90%) would like to work after the completion of their studies. 72% think that it is possible to reconcile the pursuit of a profession with familial duties. Of the latter, two thirds would like to have a part-time job. 69% of the respondents said their family was more important to them than their professional career.

Among the decent working conditions mentioned by the respondents, a respectful and cooperative working atmosphere ranked highest (24%), followed by the employees' own dedication to work (18%). Further mentioned were adequate payment, appropriate timings, female rights, independence, good management, security at work, the availability of technical facilities, and religious freedom (all 2-7%).

2.2 Studies abroad

Demand and reasons for studies abroad

A great majority (84%) of respondents would like to go abroad for study purposes, thereof 47% specified Europe and 22% North America. 74% assume they would be given admission by their parents.

The most important reasons indicated for studies abroad included the good educational level and laboratory equipment in Western countries (19%), the appeal of an entirely different environment (16%), the opportunity to improve their skills (14%), and benefits for their future career (9%).

Scholarship requirements

60% of the respondents indicated to be dependent on a scholarship in order to cover the costs for a study visit to another country. However, only 4% said they fully knew how to apply for a scholarship. 84% of the respondents would appreciate a special office for scholarship affairs at UAF. Nearly two thirds (65%) assume that female students have less chances to go abroad than male students.

Decent conditions for studies abroad

91% of the respondents think that for studies abroad a separate girls' hostel in the host country is necessary or absolutely necessary. 81% require a watchman. 51% indicated they only could go abroad when accompanied by their brother or husband. 49% would prefer to study abroad together with female friends from UAF.

3 Summary and conclusion

Most of the female agriculture students interviewed for this study do not have an agricultural family background. This is reflected in the very small number of female students intending to carry out practical agricultural work in the future. Rather, a majority of respondents intend to pursue a PhD and be employed for a part-time job once they have children, preferably within the university framework. The most favored specializations at a master's level are food science, food technology, plant breeding, genetics, and biotechnology.

There is a strong demand for study visits abroad among the female students at UAF: 84% would like to study in another country during their studies, and most of them think that their parents would agree. Yet, 60% would depend on scholarships and are not sure how to apply. In addition, half of the respondents would only go abroad in the company of a male family member. Moreover, more than 90% said they would require a separate girls' hostel for their accommodation, preferably guarded by a watchman.

The conditions the female students expect with regard to accommodation are very difficult to implement at the University of Kassel. At the faculty of Organic Agriculture in Witzenhausen, student accommodation is not separated between genders. It would require careful consideration whether the establishment of a women's floor in one of the hostels in Witzenhausen would be a possible means to provide a form of accommodation to female UAF students the latter consider as decent enough. In general, with regard to the respondents' desired specializations, an exchange on a masters' level appears to be more useful given the specializations available in the M.Sc. courses in Witzenhausen and the fact that numerous B.Sc. students at the University of Kassel (both male and female) intend to go into practical agriculture rather than science. At UAF, a first step could be to make the terms and conditions for scholarship applications and opportunities for international exchange more transparent. A close collaboration between the Universities of Faisalabad and Kassel could help make the latter more known among UAF students as an attractive university to pursue agricultural studies, and also incite more students from Kassel to choose the University of Faisalabad as their destination for studies abroad.