PhD Opportunity

‘A framework for effective Co-operative development to draw lessons for upscaling and replication: lessons from a nascent Ugandan farmers’

Cooperative

Walsh Scholarships Ref. 2020009

Applications are invited from suitably qualified candidates for a 48 month full-time, PhD Scholarship, in the Policy Lab at the National University of Ireland, Galway and Teagasc, Rural Economy & Development Programme, Athenry, Co. Galway. This opportunity is supported by the Teagasc Walsh Scholarships Programme, the NUI Galway College of Arts, Social Sciences and Celtic Studies and Self Help Africa. The PhD will be supervised by Prof Cathal O’Donoghue of NUI, Galway and Dr Mary Ryan of Teagasc, with co-supervision of Prof Constantine Iliopoulos of the Agricultural Economics Research Institute, Athens and Dr Mary O’Shaughnessy, University College Cork. The project will work closely with NGOs: Self Help Africa (SHA) - represented by Ms. Carmel Fox (former CEO Ballyhoura Development Ltd. and Partners in Learning (PiL) in Ireland and Uganda, in conjunction with Teagasc colleagues Mr Pat Murphy, Head of Environment Knowledge Transfer, Dr Lance O’Brien, Head of Strategy & International Relations and Mr. Tom Curran, Regional Manager Cork West and Prof Pat Gibbons, Director of the UCD Centre for Humanitarian Action, University College Dublin.

This project will examine nascent farmer groups in the Tororo District in Uganda, focusing on a group which has benefited from considerable NGO support and recently made the transition to a registered Co-op, yet faces financial, behavioural, climate and market challenges. The overarching objective is to develop a framework for effective development that is replicable and scalable for other community groups. A holistic Innovation System approach is adopted that is informed by Systems Thinking, to critically assess the innovations necessary at group level and the wider agri-food value chain. Research partner expertise in Innovation System analysis, Co-op and Social Enterprise development is leveraged, in combination with the experiences of stakeholders in both Uganda and Ireland.

Focusing on the Ugandan case study, we critically examine the farmer Co-op and its external operating environment, to develop an institutional and organisational framework for the strengthening of agri-food Co-ops. The project leverages the ongoing expertise and experience of Irish NGOs working with the case-study (and other) groups, with whom the PhD Walsh Scholar will be embedded for part of the scholarship.

While the research approach is analytically focused, it also incorporates a practical applied focus on ‘the last mile’ in relation to the translation of the research into relevant extension lessons for the Co-op and to facilitate replication of the methodology for similar nascent groups in developing countries. In addition, it is hoped to learn from this project to generate wider learnings that would be applicable in Ireland, in relation to the growing trend for community-led multi-actor approaches to rural development (e.g. Rural Regeneration Fund, Rural Economic Development Zones (REDZ)), participatory agri-environment schemes (e.g. Locally Led and European Innovation Partnerships (EIP)), along with farm partnerships and collaborative arrangements such as machinery sharing.
Objectives

- To draw on experiences in Irish agri-food, rural development, financial and social enterprises to facilitate the sustainable development of food producers in developing countries. These include Co-operatives, Local Development agencies, Agricultural Trust, Credit Unions/Micro-finance and Partners in Learning (PiL). Additionally, draw on international experiences such as World Bank Productive Partnerships.
- Using a holistic mapping approach, identify institutional, market and policy incentives that apply to agri-food production in Uganda to gauge the nature of the incentives (positive or negative) and where changes are necessary.
- Using a case-study Co-op, understand the necessary requirements for the long-term sustainability of nascent community enterprises in developing countries.

Qualifications:
Candidates should ideally hold a Masters in a relevant research area (e.g. Economics, Sociology, Geography, Environment Studies). Candidates should have excellent analytical, communication and organizational skills, be highly motivated and passionate about developing new research; and have strong documentation, oral and interpersonal skills.

Award: €22000 per annum including stipend and fees for four years. Starting in October 2020

Applications should be forwarded to: Sandra Brennan College of Arts, Social Science and Celtic Studies, Millennium Building, National University of Ireland, Galway (sandra.brennan@nuigalway.ie).

Closing date: 1 June 2020.