

# RUFORUM MONTHLY

The Monthly Brief of the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture

## RUFORUM Supported Graduate Programs Provide a Window and Hope for African Graduates without English Background



**Above: Saddik Kassim one of the PhD Students in Plant Breeding at Makerere University**

After completing my MSc studies in 2003 at the Department of Crop science, Faculty of Agriculture, Makerere University, I experienced an extremely short-lived joy which turned into a long period of anxiety. I was overwhelmed with joy when I was nominated for a scholarship by the Faculty of Agriculture, Makerere University and the National Agricultural Research Organization (NARO) Uganda to pursue PhD studies at Ohio State University (OSU) in the United States of America (USA). I indeed felt the 'bird' was in my hands especially after four renowned Professors, Prof P. Rubaihayo, Prof M. Bekunda, Dr. Theresa Sengooba and Prof S. Kyamanywa all strongly recommended me for the scholarship based on my science background. Prof E. Adipala, another renowned professor at Makerere had earlier introduced me to Prof. Robin

Soyre from OSU who instantly expressed enthusiasm to mentor me when I got there. With all this backing, encouragement and inspiration what else could I feel apart from excitement? Convinced because of my previous academic successes I had no imagination of any pending barriers at all.

I overlooked one single fact that my English background was poor and since English was a requirement for admission to most reputable universities in the USA it could be a barrier. My love affair with English was checkered. Largely during my primary and secondary education in Sudan both English and Arabic were used for instruction. Truly I was shocked when I sat the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and scored only 207 below the minimum of 213 required for me to take up the scholarship and admission to OSU. I was embarrassed, very stressed and suddenly developed low self esteem. I had to go into hiding for over three years from people who recommended me including Dr. Theresa Sengooba, who was then the Coordinator of Biotechnology at NARO, as I felt I had betrayed them.

I was disturbed and asked myself the following questions:

- 1) Must an African graduate pass an English test to pursue a science graduate program?
- 2) What about those with promising science capacity but with poor English background

(Continued on page 2)

- **RUFORUM Monthly** is an e-newsletter providing information on activities of the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture.
- This **Monthly Brief** is circulated on the last week of every month ■

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

**RUFORUM Annual General Meeting Zimbabwe, 4-6 August 2010**

**Regional Conference on Building Capacity for improved Food and Livelihood Security in Africa. 13-17 September, 2010**

**Ministerial Conference on Higher Education in Africa. Speke Hotel Muyonyo – Uganda. 15-19 November, 2010**

**RUFORUM Deans Meeting, 17-21 May, 2010**

**Online Registration for the Ministerial Conference on Higher Education in Africa. Please visit [www.ruforum.org](http://www.ruforum.org)**

**More information on RUFORUM activities can be accessed on the RUFORUM BLOG at <http://RUFORUMsecretariat.blogspot.com>**



For more information about the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM), Contact: The **Newsletter Editor**, RUFORUM Secretariat, Plot 151 Garden Hill, Makerere University Main Campus, P.O. Box 7062, Kampala, Uganda. Fax: +256 414 534153; Tel: +256 414 535939; E-mail: [secretariat@RUFORUM.org](mailto:secretariat@RUFORUM.org); Website: [www.RUFORUM.org](http://www.RUFORUM.org).

## RUFORUM Supported Graduate Programs Provide a Window and Hope for African Graduates without English Background

(Continued from page 1)

who may not be able to pass English tests such as TOEFL?



**Prof. Paul Gibson with Michelline one of the MSc Students**

When presenting research progress at Makerere's Faculty of Agriculture Board Room (5-6<sup>th</sup> April 2010) the MSc. students from Sudan, Rwanda and Burundi studying Plant Breeding and Seed systems did so in good English. All in attendance marveled at the transformation of the students' spoken English skills. I heard Prof Rubaihayo one of the most senior breeders in Eastern and Southern

Africa caution on issues of patent that might arise from the promising results of Michelline Inamahoro one of the Burundian students who spoke the poorest English at the time of her admission on the program.

The Regional Coordinator of RUFORUM, Prof Adipala who is known for sensitivity to quality of research projects was also visibly impressed and satisfied. He was prompted to urge each MSc student who wishes to continue interacting with farmers on his/her findings immediately after submission of his/her thesis to apply to RUFORUM for a field attachment grant. Dr. Tusiime the coordinator of graduate studies at the Department of Crop Science was similarly impressed as evidenced by his encouragement of a good number of the students including the Rwandese, Burundians and Sudanese to express their intentions to submit their Theses to the School of Graduate Studies in a record period of one and half years.

In my contribution to RUFORUM's monthly newsletter of August 2009, I did mention the unique strength of the graduate programs that she supports, especially the innovative strategies towards producing scientists with effective communication and management skills besides rich knowledge and skills in science. Aware of the histori-

cal distortion and consequently vulnerability of the African people linguistically, in this edition, I am obliged to once again commend the management of RUFORUM, Makerere University coordinators of the Plant Breeding graduate programs at Makerere University - Dr. Patrick Okori and Dr. Richard Edema for enabling brilliant African graduates with poor English backgrounds to access quality graduate studies through provision of remedial English lessons rather than prerequisite English examinations for admission. I congratulate Alliance for Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) for making this possible.

The optional English lessons given to the students of Plant Breeding and Seed systems MSc. Program by Mrs. Pauline Gibson, the wife to Prof Paul Gibson (an American), a tireless resident mentor at Makerere University Agricultural Research Institute Kabanyolo (MUARIK), where the two graduate programs are based greatly enhanced the student's ability to present their prelimi-



**Mrs. Pauline Gibson and the Students during an English Lesson**

nary results and eventually theses in good English regardless of their language backgrounds.

It is therefore my humble appeal to our African Universities to learn from the RUFORUM supported post-graduate programs and provide for remedial lessons in the languages of instruction rather than using such languages to deter potential graduates from accessing their dream universities to advance their careers.

**Saddik Kassim is on the PhD Plant Breeding and Biotechnology program, Makerere University. Email [sdkassim@agric.mak.ac.ug](mailto:sdkassim@agric.mak.ac.ug) or [sdkassim@yahoo.com](mailto:sdkassim@yahoo.com)**

## RUFORUM Purchases GenStat Licenses for Eight Universities



RUFORUM, through the support of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, purchased a 3-year license for GenStat at a cost of US\$43,000 for its following member universities: Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology; University of Nairobi, Egerton University, Makerere University, Sokoine University, University of Malawi - Bunda College of Agriculture, University of Zambia and University of Zimbabwe.

GenStat is an “all embracing data analysis tool, offering ease of use via a comprehensive menu system reinforced with the flexibility of a sophisticated programming language. All this is available in one focused environment that encourages prototyping and development, while guiding new and less experienced users through the well planned menu and diagnostic messaging. For over 30 VSN International Ltd (VSNi) have employed, and continue to work with, leading statisticians and scientists who help to create a package that succeeds for both novice and expert users in academia, research and industry. One of the many benefits of GenStat is that it is a complete package. You can use GenStat to manage and illustrate your data, summarize and compare, model relationships, design investi-

gations and of course analyze your experiments from the simplest Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) right through to the most complex Restricted Maximum Likelihood (REML). VSN International’s comprehensive range of leading edge statistical content is continually being updated in line with both industry progression and user feedback” – extracted from the VSN International website (<http://www.vsn.co.uk/software/genstat/>).

We urge staff at the Eight universities to contact the following persons to gain access to GenStat:

1. Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology: [Mr Ombwara Francis](#)
2. University of Nairobi: [Dr Kinuthia](#)
3. Egerton University: [Dr Bebe Bockline](#)
4. Makerere University: [Dr Nabasiye Margaret](#) and [Mr Muhumuza, Albert](#)
5. Sokoine University: [Dr. Matovelo](#)
6. University of Malawi: Bunda College of Agriculture: [Dr Gondwe Timothy](#):
7. University of Zambia: [Dr. Phiri Elijah](#)
8. University of Zimbabwe: [Mr Halimani Tinyiko](#)

**Story Compiled by Ms. Nodumo Dhlamini, Program Manager ICT. Email: [n.dhlamini@ruforum.org](mailto:n.dhlamini@ruforum.org)**

## The Readers Views on RUFORUM

The view shared below is from one of our partners and readers. Malcolm Blackie attended a RUFORUM Strategic Reflection Meeting 13-15 April, 2010 in Bellagio, Italy and then was stranded in Italy for 6 days after the Eyjafjallajökull volcano in Iceland.

*“Thanks for keeping in touch and sharing adventures. I can’t say I would choose to repeat the past week but I did have some good experiences. Whenever I was on the verge of giving up and just going to sit in a corner until someone found me, the Kampala team (ably supported by Fanuel Tagwira) popped up, provided African laughter and company, and kept me in good spirits until we were forced to separate. I am still not quite sure how they tracked my movements but on at least three separate occasions I was rescued from despair by the totally unanticipated arrival of support from RUFORUM. Perhaps the programme needs to develop another thematic area – it certainly would have been in great demand the past week. I was also cheered by the kindness and assistance from complete strangers – something that has gone totally unreported in all the news I have seen. There are some really good people out there.*

*And finally, I think perhaps this served to create a modest RUFORUM community which we can all continue to contribute to. Thanks to all of you. I am home and had a brilliant day playing in my vegetable garden and not standing in line for anything. I can recommend it.”*

Thank you Malcom Blackie for sharing your view about RUFORUM.

## Emerging Partnership: To Synergize African Efforts of Digitizing Agricultural Knowledge & Information

RUFORUM brought together five strategic African partners to discuss opportunities of working together towards building a sustainable infrastructure for information sharing for agricultural research and education in Africa. The planning meeting was held on the 8th to the 9th of February 2010 at the Imperial Resort Beach Hotel, Entebbe, Uganda. The following international organisations were represented:

1. Association of African Universities (AAU) represented by Dr Pascal Hoba
2. Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research In Eastern and Central Africa (ASARECA) represented by Ms Jacqueline Nyagahima
3. Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA) represented by Ms Jacqueline Nnam
4. The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) E-Africa Commission represented by Dr Towela Nyirenda-Jere
5. Women of Uganda Network (WOUGNET) represented by Ms Janet Achora
6. RUFORUM was represented by Professor Adipala Ekwamu, Ms Nodumo Dhlamini, Dr Washington Ochola and Miss Joan Apio

RUFORUM sees the European Framework Programme Seven (FP7) as an opportunity to network with European and African partners for the purposes of improving the

generation, capture, sharing and management of agricultural information and knowledge. RUFORUM is keen to ensure that her ICT strategy links with the NEPAD agenda and to progress her ICT Mission – “of using emerging technologies and opportunities offered by ICTs to strengthen the capacities of universities to foster innovations responsive to demands of small-holder farmers”. RUFORUM would also like to engage with various development partners to test emerging ICT technologies and their application to the agricultural sector for the benefit of poor communities in an endeavor to improve livelihoods. The planning meeting was very successful and this partnership now includes other partners that were not represented in the Entebbe meeting:

1. Royal Tropical Institute (KIT) - Netherlands
2. CAB International (CABI) - UK
3. Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI) - Kenya
4. University of Athens (NKUA) - Greece
5. College of Agriculture and Consumer Sciences - University of Ghana (UG)
6. Council for Scientific and Industrial Research - Institute for Scientific and Technological Information (CSIR – INSTI) Ghana

**Story Compiled by Ms. Nodumo Dhlamini, Program Manager ICT. Email: [n.dhlamini@ruforum.org](mailto:n.dhlamini@ruforum.org)**

### First Announcement

#### MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON HIGHER EDUCATION IN AGRICULTURE (CHEA) 15-19 November 2010, Speke Resort, Munyonyo, Kampala, Uganda

*“African universities and other institutions of higher learning ultimately will be responsible for replenishing the stock of human capital in national research and extension services.....As stated by NEPAD in the Framework for African Agricultural Productivity “...urgent action must be taken to restore the quality of graduate and postgraduate agricultural education in Africa.”*

RUFORUM announces the Ministerial Meeting on Higher Education in Agriculture. We invite interested individuals and institutions to register online at [www.ruforum.org](http://www.ruforum.org)

The meeting will serve to:

1. Review progress in implementing the Dar-es-Salaam meeting of Ministers and the Cape Town Declaration of Ministers responsible for Science and Technology;
2. Facilitate international networking to spur and sustain re-engineering of Higher Education Institutions in Africa;
3. Mobilize African universities to be more pro-active in engaging in Africa's development and in particular to make their due contribution to research and innovation; and,
4. Mobilize political and development commitment for increasing investments in Higher Education in Africa

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) Plot 151 Garden Hill,  
P.O. Box 7062, Kampala, Uganda Tel: +256 414 535939; Fax: +256 414534153 Email: [secretariat@ruforum.org](mailto:secretariat@ruforum.org)

## THE RUFORUM FIELD ATTACHMENT PROGRAM AWARD (FAPA)

### Supplementary Call for the 2010 Field Attachment Award

These grants are intended to provide support for more effective research into use by RUFORUM GRG students. The Award will be valid for use after handing in the completed M.Sc thesis for examination and while waiting for results. It is anticipated that the grantees will use the Award 1 October -31 December 2010.

A summary of the key requirements is given below but all prospective applicants are referred to the General Information and Guidelines which are available in the web site for full details visit [www.ruforum.org](http://www.ruforum.org).

#### Purpose:

- To provide an opportunity to continue the work of the Project with communities in finalising implementation or scaling up of some of the accepted findings from the research;
- To provide a local implementing agency (local government, farmers group, NGO, government department, research agency, private company etc) with the specialised knowledge of the student for better institutionalisation of new approaches and to enable them to assess the employability of the student/s; and,
- To provide the student with an opportunity to obtain working experience within an organisation and to make contacts for employment in the future.

#### Description:

- Students will make contact with an organisation and arrange for an attachment for the three months after they have completed their thesis;
- Students will continue with the work they have been doing and should describe this clearly in their application;
- Winning applicants may be expected to provide a short presentation or poster paper at the Biennial Meeting in September on what they will be doing during the field attachment – this could be linked to the presentation of the project;
- Grantees will normally be paid the stipend as an advance each month with the balance to be paid at the end of the attachment when all reports have been received;
- The agency the student works with will be required to provide a brief verbal or written confirmation to the Supervisor at the end of each month that the student attachment is progressing as expected. They are then requested to submit a written report on the work carried out (by the middle of the last month of attachment) to the student's supervisor and at the end of the attachment to provide the student with a reference (unless the work was not satisfactory). RUFORUM may request to receive a copy of this confirmation;
- The student will be expected to provide the editor of the RUFORUM Newsletter with a short insert (1/4 page) on

their work with the community at the end of months one and two;

- The student will be expected to provide a one page write-up of their experience for the RUFORUM alumni association newsletter at the end of month two;
- A report by the student on their experiences and on potential areas for further research and action should be submitted to the RUFORUM Secretariat through the supervisor, at the end of the attachment;
- The University will submit a brief financial report showing confirmation of receipt of the monthly stipend by the student together with the report from the host agency and the student's final report.

#### Qualification

- The attachment must be for work directly related to implementing or scaling out part of the work carried out during the RUFORUM Graduate Research Grant project;
- The grantees must be RUFORUM graduates;
- The University, through the Dean, must provide a letter of support to the application
- There must be proof of acceptance of the attachment by the host organisation;

Evidence of demand for this from the local community will be an added advantage

#### Application Process

1. Students make contact with the communities and organisations and establish the feasibility of such an arrangement;
2. The Student must prepare a brief proposal as outlined in the Guidelines for the FAPA;
3. No financial breakdown is required. This will be a monthly stipend of US\$200 paid to the student. An advance of approximately \$400 per month will then be provided to the student to cover all their transport, living, meeting and incidental expenses to achieve their objective, including all costs that are not covered by their host agency. Project proposals should not be developed in a way that requires significant co-funding in order for the work to be successful unless there is commitment in writing of the co-funding by the host agency;
4. Applications should be forwarded, together with the support evidence, to the RUFORUM Secretariat by 1<sup>st</sup> July 2010;
5. The applications will be reviewed by the Secretariat for compliance and the winning grants will be selected by the Technical Committee; and,
6. Applicants will be advised of the outcome by late August 2010.

## Prof. Adipala Ekwamu recognized for his significant contributions in Research and Higher Education in Africa



Dr. Mark Erbaugh (Left) Prof. Adipala Ekwamu (Center) and Prof. Mike Boehm at the ceremony

Professor Adipala Ekwamu was honoured with the 2010 CFAES (College of Food, Agricultural, & Environmental Sciences) International Alumni Award by Ohio State University. Prof Adipala is a

graduate of Makerere University (BSc and MSc) and Ohio State University (PhD in Plant Pathology 1992). After receiving his PhD he returned to Makerere University and moved up the faculty ranks very rapidly. He has served as chair or secretary of many key governing and advisory committees at Makerere university. Professor Adipala has published over 150 journal articles and supervised over 46 graduate students. He is a recognized local and regional leader in plant pathology and agricultural development.

Professor Adipala's achievements include the establishment of a continental scientific journal (African Crop Sci-

ence Journal [ACSJ]), and revitalization of two other journals, ultimately serving as Editor in Chief of ACSJ for a decade. He ran the continental organization, African Crop Science Society, for 6 years as its president. He has served on Boards of several national, international and Business organizations dealing in agriculture, education and science, including the Ugandan National Council for Science and Technology, the Ugandan National Agricultural Research Organization, and the International Foundation for Science (based in Sweden), and has been a consultant with FAO and several other regional and sub-regional international organizations.

He is currently serving as the Regional Coordinator of the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM), a consortium of 25 universities in Eastern, Central, and Southern Africa. In this position, he is immeasurably contributing to the re-building of agricultural science and human resource capacity of African universities by sponsoring faculty development activities and research opportunities, and new and innovative MSc & Ph.D. programs at various member institutions.

Please see the link to the Department of Plant Pathology at Ohio State University where this story was adapted from: <http://plantpath.osu.edu/alumni-and-friends/alumni>

### Findings of the ICT Situation Analysis in RUFORUM Universities

RUFORUM carried out a Situation Analysis of ICT Capability and Infrastructure in its 25 Member Universities in 2009. For the next 12 months we will be featuring key findings from this study. You could also download the ICT Situation Analysis Report from the RUFORUM website.

#### Access to Computers in RUFORUM Universities

None of the RUFORUM universities have a 1:1 student to computer ratio. The majority (30.4%) of RUFORUM universities have a ratio of 20-49 students to one computer. The recommended ratio is 2-5 computers to one student (only 8.7% have met this ratio). Interestingly, administrative staff in RUFORUM universities have better access to computers, with a ratio of 1:1 for 63.2% of the staff. 50% of the academic staff have a ratio of 1:1.

A related interesting finding was that only 11 of the 25 RUFORUM universities open student computer labs for 13 hours or more per day. In view that the student computer ratio is unfavorable, one would expect that the student computer labs would open for longer hours.

RUFORUM recommends the following university level initiatives to expand access to computers.

1. Implement thin-client or desktop virtualization solutions in computer labs.
2. Enter into agreements with computer suppliers for price reductions for students, and arrange for financing.
3. Reduce software costs by balancing proprietary and open source software
4. Charge technology fees for maintaining computer labs.
5. Commit an annual amount in the budget for new computers.
6. Keep the computer labs open longer.
7. Work with organizations that supply refurbished computers.