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Research Application Summary

The African Journal for Rural Development: A demonstration of a network of universities as a learning organization responsive to stakeholder recommendations

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Abstract

Rural development is key for the developing nations in Africa. The field is heavily centered on exploitation of land-intensive natural resources. Africa faces a myriad of challenges which offer a fertile ground for research and development. Universities and institutions of higher learning have a critical role to play in articulating these challenges to stakeholders as part of a process of generating knowledge. Given the design and scope of higher degree training and research, higher education institutions (HEIs) generate colossal amounts of knowledge as a contribution to innovations. Nonetheless, in the case of Africa the fact that HEIs generate colossal knowledge is not reflected in the global innovations index (GII). Much of the scholarly work remains unpublished and yet academic research is only relevant if its outputs are shared for uptake pathways and application. It is in light of these challenges that the Principals and Deans Committee of the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) at a foresight and planning meeting recommended the creation of a Journal. The RUFORUM is a Network of Universities in Africa and the Principals and Deans Committee constitute an important organ in governance and implementation of the Network's mission. The idea of creating a journal was conceived as part of a decade of celebrating RUFORUM's contribution to higher education in Africa. It was a surprise that despite relevant research focusing on rural development and its broad ramifications there was no (except at sub-regional level) journal in Africa dedicated to this important area. Thus, the African Journal of Rural Development (AJRD) was launched in November, 2014. The need for the AJRD was further inspired by experiences from implementation by RUFORUM Secretariat and member universities of Science, Technology and Innovation Projects supported by the European Union. These projects underscored the need for enhancing university outreach programs to secure increased reach and impact of agricultural technologies among rural communities. The AJRD is now a highly sought after scholarly outlet for research dissemination, linking and articulating research into-use to various

stakeholders, including policy-decision makers. It is a peer-reviewed open access journal whose aim is to share knowledge on all aspects that contribute to sustainable and inclusive rural development. The AJRD is an example among many other undertakings that positions RUFORUM as a learning organization responsive to stakeholder recommendations.

Key words: Knowledge, publishing research dissemination, sustainable development

Résumé

Le développement rural est crucial pour les nations en développement en Afrique. Le domaine est principalement centré sur l'exploitation intensive des ressources naturelles agraires. L'Afrique est confrontée à une myriade de défis qui offre une base productive à la recherche et au développement. Les universités et institutions d'enseignement supérieur ont un rôle capital à jouer dans l'articulation de ces défis aux parties prenantes faisant partie du processus génératrice de connaissance. Considérant le dispositif et le cadre de la recherche et de la formation des diplômés supérieurs, les institutions d'enseignement supérieur (HEIs) génèrent une quantité colossale de connaissance comme contribution aux innovations. Néanmoins, prenant le cas de l'Afrique, le fait que les HEIs génèrent une quantité colossale de connaissance ne se reflète pas dans l'Indice Global d'Innovation (GII). Bon nombre des travaux académiques ne sont pas publiés or la recherche académique serait utile si et seulement si ses résultats sont vulgarisés pour leur voie d'adoption et leur application. C'est au vue de ces défis que le comité des Directeurs et Doyens du Forum Régional des Universités pour le Renforcement des Capacités en Agriculture (RUFORUM) a recommandé, lors d'une réunion de prospection et de planification, la création d'un Journal. Le RUFORUM est un Réseau d'Universités en Afrique et le comité des Directeurs et Doyens constitue un important organe dans la gouvernance et la mise en œuvre de la mission du Réseau. L'idée de la création d'un journal était conçue dans la cadre d'une décennie de célébration de la contribution du RUFORUM à l'enseignement supérieur en Afrique. C'était une agréable surprise que malgré que de pertinente recherche se soit focalisée sur le développement rural et ses larges ramifications, il n'y avait aucun journal dédié à cet important domaine. Par conséquent, le Journal Africain de développement Rural (AJRD) était lancé en Novembre 2014. La nécessité de l'AJRD était plus encore inspirée des expériences de mise en œuvre par le Secrétariat du RUFORUM et les Universités membres des Projets de la Science, Technologie et de l'Innovation sponsorisés par l'Union Européenne. Ces projets ont mis en exergue le besoin d'amélioration des programmes d'extension des universités pour s'assurer l'accroissement de l'impact et de l'effet des technologies agricoles au niveau des communautés rurales. L'AJRD est actuellement un exutoire académique hautement prisée pour la dissémination de la recherche, liant et articulant les services de la recherche aux diverses parties prenantes y inclus les décideurs politiques. C'est un journal peer-review et d'accès libre qui a pour but de disséminer la connaissance dans tous les aspects contribuant à un développement rural durable et inclusif. L'AJRD est un exemple parmi tant d'autres entreprises qui positionnent le RUFORUM comme une organisation d'éducation, attentive aux recommandation des parties prenantes.

Mots clés : Connaissance, Publication de la dissémination de recherche, développement durable

Introduction

Africa is yet to transition to manufacturing and service based economies (DeBrauw *et al.*, 2014). A large proportion of the population in Africa rely on small scale farming; the livelihood of this population is anchored on agriculture. Thus, issues dealing with accessing land for agriculture are important for socio-economic development and differentiation for communities in rural Africa (Thomas and Tymon, 1982; Turner, 2016). For example, the endowment in land is considered in terms of the physical area and has less to do with the qualities of the land itself. Also, food security remains a major concern in policy making, and more information is required in the form of rural households to promote sharing of experiences as well as guide the policy making process at all levels (Tibesigwa and Visser, 2016). Universities are making efforts in terms of working with rural communities to improve on agricultural productivity and consequently improve on living standards. Programs being offered in universities are being mainstreamed to strengthen entrepreneurship based on knowledge economies like agriculture. The universities and other institutions have set up outreach programmes to communities in rural areas. Through these processes knowledge is generated and it is important to provide credible platforms for its dissemination and uptake. One way of achieving this noble task is through packaging research findings in the form of academic journals articles. This in part, inspired the establishment of the African Journal of Rural Development (AJRD).

The African Journal of Rural Development

In 2014, the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) celebrated 10 years as a Network of universities in Africa. As part of this celebration, a series of activities were conducted under the theme “Transforming Tertiary Agricultural Education: a Platform for the Way Forward”. The discourse on foresight and planning for the next 10 years generated several recommendations and from the Principals and Deans of African Universities that constitute the RUFORUM Network, the idea of creating a journal was conceived. This idea was further inspired by experiences from implementation by RUFORUM Secretariat and member universities of Science, Technology and Innovation Projects supported by the European Union through the European Commission and other bilateral facility. These projects underscored the need for enhancing university outreach programs to secure increased reach and impact of agricultural technologies among rural communities (see Table 1). More over, RUFORUM as a Network has committed its member universities to forge greater linkages and partnership with other actors to forster rural development in Africa. It was therefore a surprise that despite relevant research focused on rural development and its broad ramifications there was no (except at sub-regional level) journal in Africa dedicated to this important area.

The African Journal of Rural Development was launched in November, 2014. It is a demonstration of moving from planning to execution and on the part of RUFORUM, this undertaking depicts efforts of building a true learning organization. As highlighted by Senge (1990), a learning organization is one that facilitates its members to learn from each other and continuously transforms to meet aspirations. Through undertakings such as the AJRD

Table 1. Projects and respective stakeholders that recommended creation of the AJRD

Project	Member Universities and Partners engaged in implementation of respective project
Transforming Universities to Stimulate Pro-Poor Agri-Enterprise Development in East Africa Using a Round Table Approach to Post graduate Training	Egerton University; Gulu University; Round Table Africa (RTA), International Institute for Rural Reconstruction (IIRR)
Strengthening Universities Capacities for Mitigating Climate Change Induced Water Vulnerabilities in East Africa	Makerere University, Egerton University, University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna-Centre for Development Research (BOKU-CDR); Horizon 3000 and Participatory Ecological Land Use Management Uganda, CARITAS Masaka Diocese Development Organization, Uganda, Water Resources Management Authority, Kenya
Building Human and Institutional Capacity for Enhancing the Conservation and Use of Neglected and Underutilized Species of Crops (NUS) in West Africa, and Eastern and Southern Africa	The African Network for Agriculture, Agroforestry and Natural Resources Education (ANAFE), University of Nairobi, University of Malawi, Institute de Recherché et de Développement sur la Biodiversité des Plantes Cultivées, Aromatiques et Médicinales (IRDCAM), Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, Plant Genetic Resources Research Institute, Bioversity International, International Foundation for Science (IFS)
Building the Capacity of African University Graduates to foster change through Agricultural Innovation: <i>GO4IT – Graduate Opportunities for Innovation and Transformation</i>	Egerton University, Makerere University, Bunda College of Agriculture (Now Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Royal Tropical Institute, Netherlands (KIT)
Catalyzing Change in African Universities: Strengthening leadership, management and cross-cutting professional skills of eastern and southern African universities (CCAU)	Bunda College of Agriculture (Now Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources), Sokoine University of Agriculture, Makerere University, University of Greenwich, Association of African Universities, Inter University Council of East Africa, Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa and Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Co-operation ACP-EU (CTA),
Shifting from Outreach to Engagement: Transforming Universities' response to current development trends in agricultural research and training in Eastern, Central and Southern Africa	Moi University, Makerere University, Bunda College of Agriculture of the University of Malawi, Wageningen University and Research Centre (WUR), International Centre for Development Oriented Research in Agriculture (ICRA), Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA), African Forum for Agricultural Advisory Services (AFAAS), National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS), SACRED Africa, Farmers Union of Malawi

*Information generated by authors from RUFORUM Database

and several other programmatic engagements, RUFORUM has expanded its capacity to continually create and deliver results and/or expectations from various stakeholders in the higher agricultural education. New and expansive patterns of thinking have been nurtured, collective aspirations encouraged for stakeholders to continually learn from outputs and see the whole together. The AJRD is one of such outputs that will in posterity promote joint-learning among stakeholders in higher education and agricultural sectors.

Currently hosted by RUFORUM as the Publisher, AJRD has three releases per year. The journal is bilingual (English/French) and embraces the scientific rigor process through peer-review (Panda and Gupta, 2014). The mission of the AJRD is to share knowledge on all aspects that contribute to sustainable and inclusive rural development. With its broad scope of bridging the natural, physical and social sciences, the AJRD aims to address issues that should facilitate Africa's rural populations be a major contributor to meeting aspirations of the African Agenda 2063 (DeGhetto *et al.*, 2016) as well as the global agenda through the Sustainable Development Goals (Sachs, 2015). The journal is particularly dedicated to capture original research, reviews and case studies of researchers working with farmers and/ or end-users. It aims at encouraging greater uptake of technologies and innovations in rural communities. The focus is to provide and disseminate well synthesized knowledge that addresses the institutional arrangements, skills mix as well as processes that universities and other HEIs require to strengthen their academic programming in order to produce graduates and research that increases agricultural productivity and profitability, facilitate and catalyze change at community level, inform policy; and, thereby contribute to sustainable and inclusive rural development.

We have processed submissions and processed publications of those that passed the rigorous review. The published articles can be accessed via <http://www.ajrd.info/ajrd/> as part of promoting open access. The increased volume of submissions as well as the collaborative engagements depicted in the manuscripts further justify our decision to establish a multi-disciplinary journal.

Summary of submissions for the period May – September 2016

The number of paper submissions is as indicated in Figure 1. Since its inception, the journal has drawn interest to researchers from Africa and beyond. For the May – September 2016 period, the authors of the submissions that were received were drawn from countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, the Caribbean and the Americas. The authorship data depict collaborations between researchers in different geographical locations.

The paper submissions per month is as indicated in Figure 2. On average the journal attracts five manuscript submissions for review per month. This results in more than 45 submissions for the period considered. But this is likely to grow as the Journal gets established firmly.

Most of the papers submitted for review and consideration for publication have more than one author. This demonstrates an emerging ecosystem for research collaborations, which as indicated in Trank and Rynes (2003) and Van de Ven and Johnson (2006) constitutes

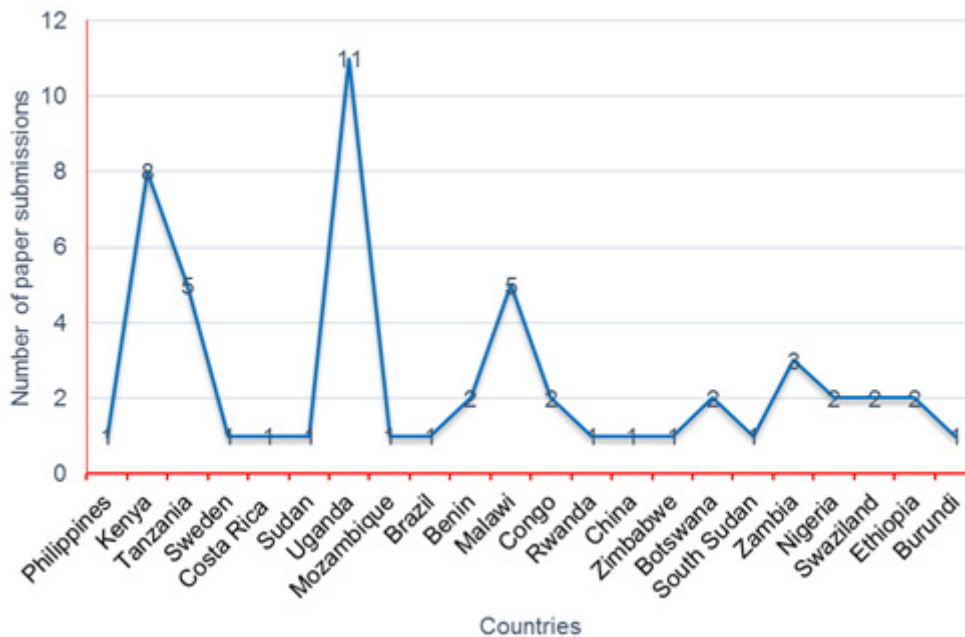


Figure 1. Number of paper submissions per country (May – September 2016)

good practice in knowledge generation. The collaborations included researchers drawn from different departments even from within a single university/institution. Other forms of collaborations include those for universities within the same country, universities in different countries in Africa, and those for universities in Africa and outside the continent, particularly from Europe, Asia, and the Americas.

Most of the research papers broadly focused on agriculture; very few papers focused on applied fields in the natural sciences e.g., information and communication technologies (ICT) that are poised to have significant impacts on rural development. The different fields within the broader sector of agriculture that the papers focused on include soil science, dairy farming, rice farming, community development, remote sensing, crop science and parasites, climate change, malnutrition, sustainable development, fish farming, forestry, weed control, honey production, and agricultural extension. These areas and others articulate the diversity of the Agricultural sector in Africa with reference to rural development (Hilson, 2016). Most of the researches were case study based (Fig. 3). They majorly entailed in-depth analysis of particular aspects of interest on rural innovations, higher education in social economic development and particular agricultural value chains within a selected geographical area. Knowledge presented provides an opportunity for learning and contextualizing scenarios of best practice that can be moved from pilots to landscapes.

Conclusion

The knowledge driven economy believes in the role of innovation in increasing the competitiveness of nations, enabling economic growth, driving societal change and building

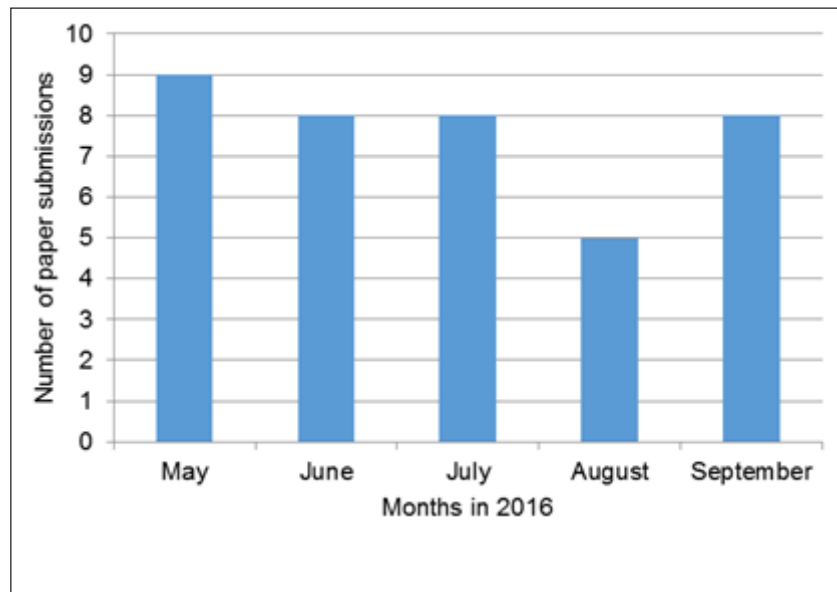


Figure 2. Paper submission per month (May – September 2016)

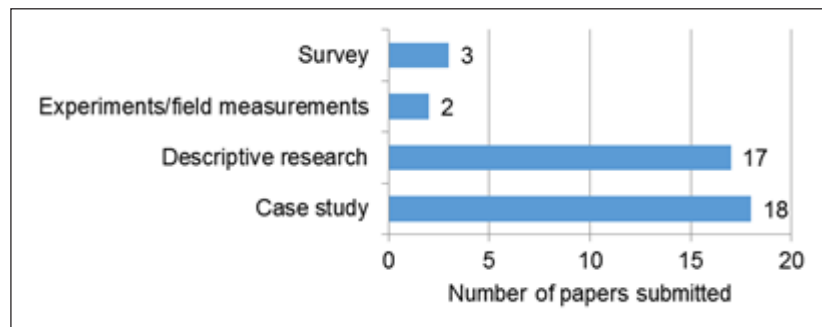


Figure 3. Type of study based on a sample of submitted manuscripts

the foundation of a country’s future. It is not surprising therefore that both sub-indices used in calculating the Global Innovations Index (GII) pay particular attention to research, knowledge and technology outputs (Dulta *et al.*, 2016). The most recent Global Innovations Index (Dulta *et al.*, 2016) reveals a glaring divide in terms of scholarly publications between the developed and developing countries with Africa more -or-less absent. Thus, efforts that provide a platform for publishing quality research and studies should be promoted. The fact that Africa does not feature prominently on the GII points to a need to engage African scholars particularly faculty and students in HEIs to publish.

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