

RUFORUM MONTHLY

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

RUFORUM EDULINK Inception Workshops held

RUFORUM conducted a series of inception workshops in Uganda from 23-25 February 2009 for three projects funded by the European Union under the African Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) EDULINK Programme for enhancing networking in higher education:

- **Catalysing Change in African Universities:** Strengthening leadership, management and cross-cutting professional skills of eastern and southern African universities (CCAU);
- **Enhancing Research Capacity and Skills** in Eastern and Southern Africa (ERESA); and,
- **Strengthening Capacity of Universities in Eastern, Central and Southern Africa** to offer Quality Graduate Training (QA).

The workshop was held at Imperial Botanical Beach Hotel in Entebbe and the main facilitator was Dr Paul Kibwika. Forty-six participants attended the three day session and they came from as far as The Netherlands, United States of America, France, South Africa, United Kingdom, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda.

The objectives of the workshop were to enable:

1. Project stakeholders achieve a common understanding of activities within the three projects;
2. Harmonize implementation plans of the three projects;
3. Clarify roles and responsibilities of partners; and,
4. Identify strategies for enhancing success.

The RUFORUM Regional Coordinator, Professor Adipala Ekwamu, officially opened the workshop, by thanking the EU for funding the



"Would there be a public outcry if ACP faculties of agriculture disappeared. Who would miss them...?" **Ms Judith Francis**, CTA

"EDULINK projects synergise well with the FARA SCARDA initiatives" **Dr. Dennis Kyetere**, Director General, NARO, Uganda and FARA Board Chair

(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 by the last week of every month ■

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- The 9th African Crop Science Society Conference will be held 28 September to 1st October 2009 in Cape Town, South Africa. The ACSS Conference series are held every odd year in one of the African countries. This year's conference theme is "Science and Technology Supporting Food Security in Africa". For more information see <http://www.acss.ws/News.aspx?id=37>
- **AWARD 2009 Fellowship Announcement.** AWARD is now accepting applications for Round Two AWARD Fellowships! The CGIAR Gender & Diversity Program warmly invites applications from qualified African agricultural women scientists for this innovative and exciting fellowship program. The deadline for all applications: Monday March 30, 2009. For more information see <http://www.genderdiversity.cgiar.org/resource/award.asp>

The 2nd World Congress of Agroforestry, 2009

The 2nd World Congress on Agroforestry will be held 23-28 August, 2009 in Nairobi, Kenya. The aim of the congress will be to assess opportunities to leverage scientific agroforestry in promoting sustainable land use worldwide. The Congress will serve as a forum for agroforestry researchers, educators, practitioners and policy makers from around the world to share new research findings, lessons, experiences, and ideas that will help influence decisions that impact on livelihoods and the global environment; explore new opportunities and cement exiting partnerships in agroforestry research, education, training, and development and form new networks and communities of practice, and nurture old ones. All interested persons are invited to submit suggestions to wca2009@cgiar.org for technical sessions or abstracts for papers before the following deadlines: Deadline for proposing technical sessions: 31st March 2008; Deadline for submitting paper abstracts (300 words maximum): 31st August 2008. For more information visit <http://www.worldagroforestry.org/wca2009/>.

For more information about the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM), contact: The **Administrator** RUFORUM, Plot 151 Garden Hill, Makerere University Main Campus, P.O. Box 7062, Kampala, Uganda. Fax: +256 41 531641; Tel: +256 41 535939; E-mail: secretariat@ruforum.org; **Website:** www.ruforum.org



CURRENT EVENTS

projects. Prof. Adipala informed participants of the important role played by the Technical Centre for Agriculture and Rural Cooperation (CTA) and the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA) in supporting RUFORUM in resource mobilization. He recognized the contribution of NATURA, a counterpart Network of European Agricultural Universities and Research Institutions and all partners in the projects. Professor Adipala noted the need to strengthen linkages with North American and European Universities, and indeed establish South-South linkages. Professor Adipala also recognized the presence of representatives of the Inter-University Council of East Africa (IUCEA), Higher Education Quality Management Initiative for Southern Africa (HEQMISA), the Commission for Higher Education in Kenya, the Uganda Council for Higher Education, and the various university representatives.

The FARA (Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa) Chair, Dr Denis Kyetere underscored the importance of strengthening leadership, management and professional skills in universities, improving research capacity and skills and implementing quality assurance in the region. He noted that this is closely related to FARA's programme for Strengthening Capacity for Agricultural Research and Development in Africa (SCARDA) and looked forward to captured synergies. Dr Kyetere indicated that he envisaged that SCARDA would provide real life case studies of weakness and capacity gaps in the areas covered by the EDULINK programmes. His hope was that the outcomes of the training would impact beneficially on initiatives being pursued under FARA and RUFORUM Initiatives.

Professor Didier Pilot from **Montpellier SupAgro** in France reminded participants that in terms of Quality Assurance "we must write what we do and do what we write".

Dr Cosam C. Joseph from the **Inter-University Council of East Africa** (IUCEA – Uganda) clarified the mandate of IUCEA, its key result areas and underscored the fact that success and effectiveness of the harmonization of quality assurance process being introduced by the IUCEA depended on full support from the universities and National higher education regulatory agencies in the respective East African countries.

Dr T.N. Ngwira presented SADC perspective on quality assurance in institutions of Higher Education. The SADC equivalent of IUCEA, the Higher Education Quality Management Initiative for Southern Africa (**HEQMISA**) was formed in 2002. He emphasized the need to include Lusophone and Francophone collaborators in the dialogue on quality assurance.

Professor Michel Lejeune, the Deputy Executive Secretary - **Commission for Higher Education in Uganda** made a presentation that focused on leadership and management. He reminded participants that it was imperative that young people are involved in mapping out their future. Further, he noted that Vice Chancellors must evolve and become executives who are in touch with what is happening on the ground.

Dr Hamish Gow from **Michigan State University** spoke about "learning by immersed discovery" based on partnerships for industry development. Industry, universities and farmers get together to design and implement programs that address the problem of "how to create appropriately trained talent in the form of university gradu-

ates". Graduate students are seen as agents of change and carefully selected and taken through a well thought curriculum including experiential learning, resulting in a product that will solve problems and become agents of change.

The final workshop proceedings will be posted on the RUFORUM website www.ruforum.org

The RUFORUM Secretariat would like to thank all those that participated in the EDULINK inception workshop and contributed to its success. RUFORUM hopes that partners will own the implementation processes that have been initiated and ensure quality and timely delivery of the promised outputs.

Makerere University-Rebuilding a Reputation

Fostering a research culture has put Uganda's Makerere University back on its feet and is inspiring others, says Peter Wamboga-Mugirya. Patrick Okori, a crop scientist at Makerere University in Uganda, is breaking a departmental habit of 40 years. He is employing a postdoctoral fellow. "Today," beams the triumphant scientist from behind his spectacles, "I have been able to employ the very first postdoctoral fellow in the department. And I have also trained 17 postgraduates, 14 MScs and three PhDs over the last four and a half years." Across the university other scientists tell similar stories as Uganda's highest seat of education gradually regains its prestigious reputation of 40 years ago.

Makerere was founded in 1922, under the British colonial administration, as Makerere Technical School. After independence in the 1960s it developed an international reputation, nurturing many East African leaders. It became an independent university in 1970. But after 15 years of political turmoil, beginning in 1971, Makerere was almost bankrupt. It was losing its underpaid teachers. Those that remained supplemented their incomes through other work, leaving little time for tutoring their students. Research was at the bottom of the agenda, as was exposure to the international academic scene. As a result, the general attitude was "a lack of appreciation for the relevance of research, a lack in experience and skills for doing research and an emphasis on financial gain as the key motive for undertaking research," according to an analysis of Makerere commissioned by Canada's International Development Research Centre.

Back from the brink

But Makerere is turning itself around. Change began in the early 1990s. Makerere devised a series of university-wide strategic plans. In 1992 it went semi-private, a pivotal move that generated much-needed revenue from students (although science benefited less than other subjects).

It is the changes of the last decade, however, that are attracting international interest. As a result of them the university has started producing healthy numbers of PhD students and has created a vibrant research culture. Makerere's buildings reflect its chequered

(Continued on page 3)

story. The main building, with its 1920s British colonial architecture and its sporadically chiming clock, dominates the campus, but the tallest and newest building houses the Faculty of Computing and Information Technology.

Donors who have helped Makerere's transition include NORAD, the Pfizer Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation. But the key player today is the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida), with its Bilateral Collaborative Research Support programme worth 238 million Swedish Kroners (US\$27 million). In 1999 Sida started working with Makerere to help it reach a position where it could set about finding its own solutions to Uganda's problems.

Initially, the agency worked with individual researchers and faculties. But a bigger idea emerged: that the changes they were helping to bring about would endure only if the background context - the management, the money, the procurement, the infrastructure - were also transformed.

Support at all levels

Sida decided to engage at all levels of the university as well as with influential outsiders such as the government. That way it might regenerate research and improve analytical thinking - and thus evidence-based decision-making - for the whole of Uganda. "The aim of the programme is to support an environment that is conducive for research and research training," says George William Nasinyama, deputy director in charge of research at the School of Graduate Studies - the coordinating office for research at Makerere and a nucleus for its transformation.

Hannah Akuffo, Sida's officer in charge of the bilateral support programme, agrees, saying, "It is important for the researcher to have an environment conducive to research, otherwise it leads to frustration". The aim is to instill a research culture, producing qualified lecturers who build research groups around themselves. The reformers selected some research themes that would encourage cross-disciplinarity. One, for example, was Lake Victoria and other water resources. Pursuing this drove faculties to pool their information, says Nasinyama.

Okori certainly feels this first goal has been successful. After training abroad he might have returned to a harried researcher's existence with few tools, little money and inadequately trained staff. Instead, he has a new laboratory and settling-in funds. He and his collaborators plan to train up to 17 more graduate students in the next four years.

International winners

Makerere's vice chancellor, Livingstone Luboobi, notes that units that have been supported under the programme are now able to search for funding themselves. "We now write competitive research proposals that win funding. About 15 years ago, this was not the case," he says. Okori, for example, has already won several research grants.

Another central objective - to increase the number of staff with PhDs - is also well underway, with 156 PhD students trained since 2000. Akuffo says this "provides a bottom-up approach to improvement," adding, "It has sometimes been frustrating for

the PhD candidates, but it has led to many positive changes."

Developing information communication technology (ICT) and library support was a third key goal. Akuffo believes this is the single most important outcome of Sida's intervention. The university developed an ICT master plan and then solicited several funding sources.

Now it is surging ahead, with more than 8,000 open-access electronic journals available. Having widespread internet access has also revolutionised collaboration and supervision. It has put Makerere on the global research radar. Makerere's ability to coordinate and administrate research programmes has also been enhanced under the programme through the development of its school of graduate studies. Today, nearly 32,000 students, young and old - and nearly half of them female - frequent the campus. Over 2,000 - just over six per cent - are international. There are 22 academic units and the university's annual budget is about US\$56million. Close to 5,000 students graduate each year.

Still a way to go

But all is not yet perfect and some successes have heightened the challenges. The recent report for IDRC, which it commissioned to assess its own support to the university, highlighted the strain caused by the enormous number of students, up from just 7,000 in the 1990s. Problems include large classes, increased teaching and marking loads and poor salaries, said the IDRC, noting that "at the same time, [staff] are facing an increasing pressure to conduct research and publish". Meanwhile there is competition for students - whose revenue is vital - from the rising number of private universities in Uganda. Others say that donors are in general unwilling to fund desperately-needed new buildings. The halls of residence, for example, suffer from water shortages and the occasional burst sewer.

Akuffo agrees there are many challenges ahead, singling out "the inability of Makerere to work out a more efficient way to procure materials needed for doing research" as one that endangers a lynchpin of the 'enabling culture'. "This needs to be sorted out otherwise it will continue to frustrate researchers," she says.

Success is contagious

But despite the challenges, the future looks promising - and not just for Makerere. Nasinyama says Makerere's successes are catching the attention of other public universities in Uganda who are coming to it for help - for example with staff training. "We now have the potential to develop world class centres of excellence in regional development issues such as health, agriculture, engineering, technology and social sciences," he adds.

Eli Katunguka Rwakishaya, director of Makerere's School of Graduate Studies, has attributed the progress to Sida supporting both university and national priorities; promising long-lasting commitment involving considerable investment, and the "deep, interactive partnership" the agency has fostered between Ugandan and Swedish researchers. And Luboobi says there has been a major shift in thinking and new ways of working. "I recall when we used to sit and just wait for interested partners or donors' sympathy," he says. "The programme has instilled a new culture of working for ourselves and no longer waiting for manna to fall from heaven."

This article is reproduced from Sci Dev;
Author: Peter Wamboga-Mugirya
Date of publication: 11th March, 2009

DON'T ABANDON RURAL AFRICA

Many students at African agricultural universities are happy to have escaped the poverty in the countryside, and they turn their backs on it. 'But they have a moral obligation to work with farmers for a better future for the rural community', says Dr. Paul Kibwika, the Ugandan alumnus who received the Alumnus Award at Wageningen University's dies natalis

Born in 1965, Kibwika is the son of poor farmers who, like most Ugandans, had to scrape a living growing beans, maize, cotton and coffee on a small plot of land. He was lucky enough to be the youngest, and his parents saved up to send him to school. At a later stage his sister and brother paid his school fees. And so he managed to reach Makerere University in the capital, Kampala, where he did a BSc in agricultural extension and an MSc in education.

“African students have a moral duty to do their best for rural development” Said Dr. Paul Kibwika

‘when I began my PhD research in Wageningen in 2002 with Professor Paul Richards, I was asked in a workshop what my research would contribute to the development of agriculture in Uganda’, says Kibwika. ‘That got me thinking. I hadn't actually given it much thought. Just like many student researchers. I hadn't yet thought about whether my research would contribute to change.’

It struck Kibwika that a lot of research and teaching at his University in Kampala was of real academic value, but didn't relate to what farmers needed. And even when the research results had practical value, they didn't reach the farmers. ‘In Africa people go for higher education to escape from agriculture and rural areas. Even if they study at an agricultural university, they will tell others what to do. Agriculture is associated with poverty, and that's what people want to get away from: What is more, many courses at agricultural universities in Africa stem from colonial times, and train instructors rather than farmers’.

In the training course, which Kibwika is still running, he first shows the teachers that there is a huge rift separating the theory taught at universities from the practice farms in country side. He then goes on to show that it is possible to conduct research differently, together with farmers. And finally, the teachers and researchers learn the social competencies they need to conduct this action research. ‘Above all this new way of working requires self –reflection from the teachers’ says Kibwika. They have to confront themselves, just as I did at one point, with the question of what their work is contributing to the rural areas and the community.

Kibwika meets resistance from the teachers who would rather hang on to their familiar way of teaching and doing research. And from university managers, because this innovation work demands a new systems of assessment. Researchers should no longer be assessed on their publications alone, but also on their involvement with farmers. And yet Kibwika's work is popular and in other universities in the region too. A group of researchers in the Regional Universities Forum in Agriculture (RUFORUM), a network of Africa agricultural universities, is already working in the same way.

Kibwika sees the Alumnus Award for Innovative Development which Wageningen University Foundation has honored him as recognition that he can use in Uganda to take his work further. ‘Many teachers come from the rural areas, but it is precisely those who have had more education who are more detached from rural life. That is betraying the community,’ says Kibwika. I make a moral appeal to African University students. It was the rural poor who brought them where they are now. They have a moral duty to do their best for rural development.’

Source: **RESOURCE, Wageningen University Issue #20 Newsletter**



Dr. Paul Kibwika receives The Alumnus Award at Wageningen University

The International Potato Center (CIP) is proud to announce the **15th Triennial Symposium of the International Society for Tropical Root Crops (ISTRC)** to be held in Lima, Peru from 2 to 6 of November of 2009. CIP is co-organizing the meeting with partners at the National Agrarian University of La Molina, Lima Peru. Additional information and details can be found in the Symposium's Web Page:

<http://www.cipotato.info/>

Please share this information with the scientists of your institutions as well as to other institutions that might be interested on these crops, and please let us know. For any specific comment or suggestion, please write to us at the following e-mail address:

CIP-ISTRC@cgiar.org

We encourage you to pre-register before 15 May, 2009 and also prepare the abstract of your work, before 15 June, 2009. We look forward to seeing you in Lima.