

# RUFORUM MONTHLY

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

## SPECIAL FOCUS ON THE SCARDA STRENGTHENING CAPACITY FOR AGRICULTURAL INNOVATION (SCAIN) A SCARDA INITIATIVE

As the end of a year approaches we tend to think back over the previous twelve months and recall our experiences at home and in the workplace. For the many people who have been involved in the Strengthening Capacity for Agricultural Research for Development (SCARDA) project, or in follow-on activities under Strengthening Capacity for Agricultural Innovation (SCAIN), this time of reflection has special significance. After almost five years, external support for these capacity strengthening initiatives is drawing to a close. What will be their legacy and how will the people and organizations who have participated in the various activities continue to apply the skills and knowledge they have acquired?



Above: The SCAIN initiative encouraged information dissemination and bridging the communication gap between farmers and research institutes

valued the wide range of training activities that was provided. This went far beyond the standard curricula of the universities where they were registered and included workshops on personal mastery and soft skills, scientific data management and writing proposals and technical papers. Added to this was the opportunity to present their work at scientific gatherings such as the African Crop Science Society Conferences in Cape Town (2009) and Maputo (2011). As well as honing their presentation skills, attendance at these meetings enabled students to meet other researchers in their areas of interest and so expand their professional networks.

RUFORUM has played an important role in these capacity strengthening initiatives, particularly through its support for Masters training in Eastern, Central Southern Africa for which it had specific responsibility. The testimonies of the students who graduated through this programme, some of which are featured in this special issue, show how much they

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- **RUFORUM Monthly** provides information on activities of the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture.
- This **Monthly Brief** is available on the last week of every month ■

### ANNOUNCEMENTS

**PAEPARD Steering Committee Meeting,** 6 February, 2012

**Agricultural Research in Africa Meeting.** 20 - 22 March, 2012. Brussels

**TEAM Africa Planning Meeting.** 26-28 March, 2012. Wageningen University of Research (WUR)

**3rd RUFORUM Biennial Conference.** 24 - 28 September 2012. Dar es Saalam, Tanzania

**8th RUFORUM Annual General (AGM).** September 2012. Dar es Saalam, Tanzania

More information on RUFORUM activities can be accessed on the RUFORUM BLOG at <http://ruforum.wordpress.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); or visit RUFORUM Website at [www.ruforum.org](http://www.ruforum.org).



## Strengthening Capacity for Agricultural Innovation - A SCARDA Initiative

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For RUFORUM, a key part of its contribution to the legacy of the capacity strengthening initiatives will be catalysing change in its member universities so that they are able to better prepare students for the demands of the workplace. Also, encouraging universities to be more flexible in meeting the needs of overseas students should bring further benefits. One example of this is the provision of English language training for students with limited English when they apply to register. The experience of SCARDA showed that, given suitable support and encouragement at the beginning of a Masters programme, students can make rapid progress in improving their language skills and can quickly make useful contributions to discussions with their classmates.

For the students themselves, the critical question is how they will be able to utilise their training to further their own professional development and that of their organizations. Many SCARDA graduates now occupy senior positions in their organizations and are leading research in particular disciplines or programmes, whilst others are continuing their studies at PhD level. Two graduates from South Sudan face special challenges as they work with the Ministry of Agriculture to help develop the agriculture sector in the new country. Lado Mogga and Luka Awata are plant breeders who are working to develop improved varieties of rice and maize, respectively. They recently received funding from the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) to continue this work, building on initial contacts with AGRA staff made while they were studying at Makerere University in Uganda.

Food insecurity is a major problem in South Sudan and

food prices are currently extremely high. The presence of qualified researchers such as Lado Mogga and Luka Awata is vital to the overall effort to ensure that everyone in the country has access to sufficient food at prices they can afford. Burundi and Sudan, which also participated in SCARDA activities, face significant challenges to feed their growing populations whilst protecting the natural resource base on which sustainable production depends. The agricultural research systems in these countries are undergoing structural change and the SCARDA graduates will have key roles to play in the new arrangements. Facilitating collaboration with partner organizations in other countries in the region, making use of linkages developed in SCARDA, will enable their institutes to access additional knowledge and resources and help them to take advantage of new opportunities that arise.

*The SCARDA project, which was coordinated by the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa, began in February 2007 and ended in March 2011. SCARDA was implemented in East and Central Africa by the Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa (ASARECA) and SADC in Southern Africa. RUFORUM was involved in the project from the outset and is a core partner in a short follow-on initiative, Strengthening Capacity for Agricultural Innovation (SCAIN), which ends in December 2011. Outputs from both SCARDA and SCAIN are available on an electronic platform hosted on the RUFORUM website (<http://ruforum.org/scain>).*

***We Acknowledge for Funding Initiatives from Department for International Development in the UK.***

### Students Under SCARDA Tell Their Story: YAW DANSO



I pursued an MSc. Plant Breeding course at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) in Ghana courtesy of the SCARDA program. I successfully completed the study in June 2010 and returned to my mother institution (CSIR-Crops Research Institute) in Ghana. I have since been upgraded to the position of Research Scientist and have been actively involved in research and development (R & D) activities at my work place. I have been greatly exposed especially due to the mentorship and integration (M & I) activity incorporated to complement the MSc training programme. This has helped me to publish four refereed journal and three edited local and international conference papers.

I was privileged to have my other SCARDA colleague witnessing my marriage ceremony during the second year of the course. I am currently blessed with a baby-boy (Reginald Okyere Danso) whose birth coincided with the timely completion of my MSc training work.

## Students Under SCARDA Tell Their Story: HABONAYO GLORIOSE



Training under SCARDA has impacted a lot on my professional carrier. Due to the skills acquired, I improved a lot in research planning and research conduct as well as report writing. However, during my training, with my classmates we got so many topics to search on them and after writing, we did presentations in front of

lecturers and colleagues. We got many comments which allowed us to improve our writing and presentations skills. We were exposed to online searching in books or journals, writing articles and presentation. Before the training, I was afraid to present in front of many people or to make a speech at any occasion. Now that fear has gone and I conduct meeting without any problem. Furthermore, the training helped me to improve my knowledge in planning and implementation of projects.

During the training, I attended learning and mentoring workshops where I got new knowledge in coaching and mentoring concepts as well as knowledge in leadership management. Collaboration and communication with my boss and colleagues has improved a lot through feedback research activities such as data collection and analysis and the trainings that were organized in English. I have improved my skills in publishing research results.

There are so many scientific documents written and published in English. Understanding the English language allows me to follow the evolution of research, innovations and also to review literatures easily.

My training has been profitable to my research institute

and country. I use my knowledge to implement research projects which are multidisciplinary and inter-regional. Researchers from different programmes come together and implement projects which are submitted to different donors. One successful research project has been sponsored by Belgium project that aims to improve the livelihood of farmers. This project will be helpful to the country, researchers involved in the project and also the institution. However, it is planned that after the research, the results will be published in scientific journals for visibility of our institution. Students sponsored by SCARDA will use skills obtained during our training to implement regional project research and thereafter submit to donors.

The training was also been helpful to my colleagues' researchers through the sharing of knowledge. I am involved in implementation of regional research project that are already sponsored and sometimes I help my fellow researchers during report writing to translate French- English or vice versa.

I would like to thank very much organizations and people who contributed to the successful completion of my training. I sincerely thank all my lecturers of SOKOINE UNIVERSITY particularly my supervisors, Prof. Semoka, J. M. R and Dr. Rweyemamu, C. L. I am grateful to Dr Ekaya (RUFORUM Programme Manager, Training and Quality Assurance), Prof Adipala and Dr Joseph Methu for their good cooperation during my studies. My sincere gratitude goes to ASARECA, RUFORUM, FARA, SUA, ISABU and PICO-Team.

I would like to suggest that the training program be continued so that our institute and our country work together for development.

### **NEW DEADLINE DATE FOR SUBMISSION OF THE CALL FOR PAPERS CLIMATE CHANGE AND AGRICULTURE IN AFRICA 15th March, 2012**

#### **For more information please contact:**

African Crop Science Journal Secretariat, Makerere University, College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, P.O. Box 7062, Kampala, Uganda; Tel. + 256 772 478404; +256 772 468 919; Email: [jstenywa@agric.mak.ac.ug](mailto:jstenywa@agric.mak.ac.ug); [nampalap@agric.mak.ac.ug](mailto:nampalap@agric.mak.ac.ug); [acsjclimatechange@gmail.com](mailto:acsjclimatechange@gmail.com); [acss@agric.mak.ac.ug](mailto:acss@agric.mak.ac.ug)



## Students Under SCARDA Tell Their Story: LAWRENCIA DONKOR ACHEAMPONG



My name is Lawrencia Donkor Acheampong (Nee Agbenyikey). I work at the Crops Research Institute of Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, Ghana (CSIR-CR). In 2008 I was sponsored by the SCARDA programme (Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA) to undertake a Master's degree programme in Librarianship at University of Ghana, Legon. Before the programme I was an Assistant Administrative Officer assisting the Institute's Scientific Secretary. After the training I was appointed to head the Institute's Library which has not had any qualified Librarian for over ten years. My first activity was to re-organise the library to befit the kind of library for a research institute like CSIR-CRI by processing the materials at the Library and subscribing to current and relevant journals (Print and electronic). This I have done. The second project was to bring together all information on research findings of the Institute since its inception in 1964. This information would be used for Institutional Repository. I have written proposals to fund this project. In the meantime I have scanned scientific information which is readily available to get the electronic version of all the information. These include: staff theses (from diploma to PhD.), technical papers, conference/workshops/seminar papers (edited and unedited),

manuals, newsletters among others. Apart from the training I received from the university, I gained the following:

1. The integration programme organized by SCARDA gave me the opportunity to be mentored by an experienced senior member.
2. The programme also exposed me to network with experienced persons in my field of work.
3. The SCARDA programme provided opportunity to attend seminars, conferences and workshops.
4. I gained knowledge in information management and organization which will enhance scientists' access to electronic and other sources of information in various fields of agriculture. This will keep scientists, students and the other library users on top of current issues and developments in their fields of research.
5. The training helped improve my skills for oral presentation, management, organizational and leadership; it also gave me courage to face challenges in execution of my work as the head of the Library.

The title of my thesis was "Access to and Use of Information Centres among Scientists at CSIR-Crops Research Institute in Kumasi, Ghana. Out of my thesis I have been able to develop two articles for publication. SCARDA also gave me a brand new laptop to enhance my work.

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## Students Under SCARDA Tell Their Story: NADA SIDDIG ABDALLA



My name is Nada Siddig Abdalla from Agricultural Research Corporation (ARC), Gezira Sudan. I was lucky to pursue M.Sc. study in Agricultural Information and Communication Management course at Egerton University in Kenya supported by SCARDA, ASAR-ECA and RUFORUM. I graduated in May 2011 and went

back to my workplace (ARC) in my home country Sudan. Since I completed my MSc study things have gone especially well, I have been able to develop a great so-

cial and scientific network through participating in conferences and workshops offered by RUFORUM.

I moved on after the hard time I faced during attending class work when everything was in English. It was so hard to understand the lectures. I used to tell my colleagues that I wanted to go back home, because I won't make it and life is just tough. My colleagues liked saying "don't stress yourself you could go back" but deeply an inner voice prevented me from giving up. I told my colleagues "it is embarrassed if I go back to Sudan and tell my boss I could not make it because English is tough". Then I decided to stay and complete the study successfully. The SCARDA program has been powerful in building my personality and career

## Students Under SCARDA Tell Their Story: MBONIHANKUYE CYRILLE



I'm MBONIHANKUYE Cyrille from Burundi. I'm working in ISABU in the Horticulture Program. I'm an MSc student in SUA, Department of Crop Science in Horticulture under SCARDA sponsorship. For the moment I'm in my country while I'm waiting to be graduated in November this year. The training has impacted me on my professional carrier in strengthening my capacity of research in my Institute. Indeed I have improved the way I'm doing my research. Before the training I was not having a sufficient baggage to conduct research correctly. The fact that the training was in an English speaker country helped me to know this important language and to interact with people of the East Africa region.

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For my Institute, I'm participating in many activities such as implementing projects, helping in writing reports specially those which are in English. For my country, I introduced new sp and varieties of vegetables and fruits which are being evaluated under Burundian conditions. I'm also sensitizing young Burundians to find some scholarships to do their degree in Eastern African countries, so that they can overcome their problem in English.

Our Institute ISABU does not have PhD holder researchers and this is a major problem especially for competitive projects where PhD holders are only required to run some project. Other thing that I can add to this is that I wish to get a scholarship for PhD degree so that I can improve my capacity of research and therefore be more competitive. Also our Institute needs many scholarship of MSc and PhD degree to conduct good research activities.

## Students Under SCARDA Tell Their Story: BLACKSON PHIRI JEKE



My names are Blackson Phiri Jeke, the Vice Principal of Natural Resources Development College (NRDC) under the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock of the Republic of Zambia. I'm about 50 years now, married with five children. I started working with Natural Resources Development College in 2008 in the said position after working with the Ministry of

Agriculture for 17 years in extension based at various provinces and districts and serving in various portfolios.

When I came to NRDC, I found the SCARDA programme in its infancy and got involved in it. As part of the management of the college, I participated in the planning of the activities of the project including the training programmes and the members of staff to be trained. Since I had not yet acquired a Masters degree, I also got an opportunity to be sponsored by SCARDA. Of the nine members of staff sponsored, I was the last one to start my training programme in January 2010 for 24 months. My 24<sup>th</sup> month is December 2011 and I'm currently waiting for the defence of my thesis as I'm through with my research work and the thesis is back from external examiner and I'm just waiting to defend any time.

It has been a very good experience for me to do this pro-

gramme. I have renewed my memories and sharpened my knowledge and skills working with the computer and internet so intensely during my course work and research. My scientific writing skills have improved greatly and the passion for conducting research has been revived. When I return to my work place, I see myself being more motivated and enthusiastic to work with students and staff, and other research and industry stakeholders in pushing forward the agriculture development agenda of my country. Delivering course materials to students will be done much better now with the skills obtained during my training.

I'm very grateful to SCARDA for the sponsorship and Dr Joyce Macala for how the funds were actually channelled. Though I was the last one to start the programme, funding was very smooth as SCARDA paid all the required finances within the first academic year. My research was, therefore, not delayed resulting in my finishing the programme on schedule. Financing MSc students in bits contributed to delays in executing the programmes on time. The other way of ensuring timeliness is to send the finances into students' bank accounts so that university management does not affect the students' programmes. I also had a chance of presenting a paper from my research findings at the

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10<sup>th</sup> International Conference of the African Crop Science Society in Maputo, Mozambique, which was a very good experience as I interacted with high profile scientists from all over Africa and beyond. The investment SCARDA has made will pay off as I will fully apply myself to contributing positively to the development of agriculture in Zambia.

### Students Under SCARDA Tell Their Story: IMANI SIBOMANA



By this written report, we extend our sincere gratitude to SCARDA and RUFORUM as our sponsors for the financial support given throughout the period of our MSc training.

The 2 years of training had an impact on my professional carrier as a university assistant lecturer. The teaching practices

given for demonstration were useful in a way to help us master the course of interest and mostly the topic to be given during a given period. Also, the field attachment and practices were of great importance.

As an impact to my country, the DR Congo has enough potential in the agriculture sector. Agriculture accounts for about 57.9% of the Congolese's

economy with an estimated 70% of the population depending on the sector either directly or indirectly. There are many opportunities: projects need to be conceived and executed to contribute to the rural development since the horticulture sub-sector has grown to become an important source of food security. Products development for horticultural produce needs a particular care in designing organisational strategies. With our institution of learning and local (nongovernmental) organisations, we will continue working with them and we will apply all the knowledge and new techniques to strengthen local productivity.

The positive part in our training is that the language barrier is broken. Coming from a French speaking country (DR Congo), we are now able to communicate and present papers in both languages (English and French). On top of that, we really appreciate the donation of computers that allowed us to work easily. The training on proposal writing and the RUFORUM biennial conference had great impacts on our carrier advancement.

### Students Under SCARDA Tell Their Story: ABUBAKARI MUTARI



My name is Abubakari Mutari of the Savanna Agricultural Research Institute (SARI) mandated to conduct research on various crops cultivated in the guinea savanna zone of Ghana. I was sponsored by SCARDA to pursue a MSc. in Food Safety and Quality Management (Postharvest Technology) at the Natural

Resources Institute of the University of Greenwich in the UK. After my return from the MSc. training, I have been engaged as a research scientist at my mother institute (SARI). At the station, I carried out a study with a colleague to assess the effects of fertilization and stage of harvesting on the storability and shelf life of tomato and this was repeated during the just-ended wet season.

I am currently doing some work on integrated soil fertility and nutrient management on the quality of chilli and tomato in the Northern part of Ghana.

As part of my added role as a focal person for the Food for Life (F4L) project with the Community Life Improvement Programme (CLIP), a NGO in Tamale, I am involved in training of farmers on postharvest management using non-chemical methods of controlling storage pests of cowpea and maize employing solarisation and triple bagging technology.

I am a secretary to the think tank of the F4L project. I am involved in handling correspondence, organizing bi-monthly meetings of the group, training of farmers and media on climate change and food security issues, organising workshops and conferences for stakeholders in food security and climate change.

I wish to indicate that on the 30<sup>th</sup> of November, I was blessed with a baby boy named Abubakari - Sadik.

## Students Under SCARDA Tell Their Story: BABIKER AHMED KHALIFA



I am Ahmed Babiker Ahmed Khalifa from Sudan. After graduating from University of Khartoum (Agriculture, Horticulture Sciences). I worked in the Agricultural Company in Khartoum as an Agricultural Engineering. My responsibilities during the above mentioned period included the

following activities Designing, Installation and operation of modern irrigation systems (Drip and Sprinkler Irrigation system). This period gave me more knowledge, information and practices about the modern of irrigation systems. Therefore I established my experimental research in the field (designing and installing the net drip irrigation system) without problems.

From 2007 up to date I have been working in the Agricultural Research Corporation (ARC) as an Assistant Research Scientist. My responsibilities include experimental design and layout of experiments, execution of experiments, data collection, data analysis and reporting. Currently I am engaged in the conduction of an experiment on drip irrigation and fertigation for citrus and ba-

nana experiments. I have been also involved in designing and installing of nets of irrigation for different vegetables crops in greenhouses. My MSc research was "Effect of drip irrigation system on growth, yield and yield components of banana cv. Grand Nain (*Musa AAA*) under different irrigation regimes compared to traditional surface system in Gezira". I am still compiling my Thesis. I submitted my second draft and have received some comments and I'm working on my third draft. I have not completed my MSc study but I expect to complete soon.

The Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) gave me a golden chance for participating in two conferences and this helped me very much to make wonderful and useful discussions with other colleagues from different parts of the world, who came together with different cultures.

I also I participated in different workshops sponsored by Strengthening Capacity for Agricultural Research and Development in Africa (SCARDA). I have gained from this participation socially, scientifically and have much confidence as a young research scientist.

## Students Under SCARDA Tell Their Story: SAHO MARIAM

My MSc journey was one of turbulence. It had its lows and highs during pre and post studies. During the course of my studies I lost both my parents. A couple of months after graduation one of my childhood and best friend passed on, Ramatoulie Guisse (who was SCARDA funded MSc graduate in Post harvest technology, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Kumasi, Ghana).

BUT its not all that gloomy. I am happy to have gone through the experience and I came out of it better in many ways. Personally SCARDA training has boosted my confidence and my work in general. I continue to serve the National Agricultural Research Institute (NARI) as Senior Research officer, overseeing the livestock program in the Gambia. Upon my return to the Gambia I became the chairperson of the Business winning team (also a SCARDA initiative) where we are tasked to find

alternative sources of research funds. In the process the team has worn two consultancies. I have also participated in a series of workshops for drafting the food safety bill and establishment of a Food Safety Agency for The Gambia. Currently, I am the national coordinator for the "Sustainable Intensification of Crop-sheep and goat integration project" funded by AusAid under the auspices of CORAF/WECARD project which is being implemented in Ghana, Mali, Benin and Gambia

To top it all, I recently got marriage to my wonderful "hubby" Mustapha Danso. This is my story. I am Mama Mariama Saho from NARI, The Gambia. MSc in Food Safety and Quality Management, under SCARDA was conducted at University of Greenwich



## Building Capacity of Universities: E-learning Training Held at Kordofan University

The RUFORUM Secretariat partnered with Futuristic Ltd of Kenya and successfully conducted an e-learning workshop at Kordofan University for 65 staff of the university from the 5<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> December 2011. The training workshop focused on two target groups: (1) the decision makers and (2) the academic faculty and technical support staff. The programme covered the following key concepts: Developing E-learning Policies and Strategies for Policy Makers at the University of Kordofan and Introducing E-learning Concepts for Academic Faculty, with a focus on Overview of E-learning, Approaches to E-learning, Technology Issues, Content Issues, Introduction to E-learning Management Systems, Introduction to Web 2.0 Tools and Introduction to RUFORUM Platforms such as SCAIN and CENA. During the follow up feedback survey 100% of the respondents indicated that they would recommend similar training for their colleagues. The most notable outputs from the training was the development of a draft e-learning strategy by Kordofan University and the installation of the Moodle Learning Management System where academic staff have begun to upload their teaching content. The e-learning strategy for Kordofan University is being translated to French and Arabic for purposes of sharing with potential funding and implementing partners.



Above: The Vice Chancellor, Prof. Ahmed El Tigani El Mardi (Standing) and the facilitators from Right Mr. Nicholas Kimolo, Ms. Nodumo Dhlamini and Dr. Ali Musa Abakar Eissa during the opening of the training at Kordofan University

## Building Capacity of Universities: Getting Value out of Web 2.0 Tools

As part of the SCAIN Project (Strengthening Capacity for Agricultural Research for Innovation), RUFORUM partnered with Futuristic Ltd and Pamoja Media to run two training workshops at Makerere University (1-2 December 2011) and University of Nairobi (9-11 December 2011) for students on the regional post-graduate programmes. The theme of the two workshops was: "Web 2.0 Tools for Collaboration & Community Building". At least 70 students were trained in the two universities. The main objective of the training was to introduce the participants to some of the RUFORUM supported e-platforms, with a special focus on SCAIN, CENA and Face Book Group for the RUFORUM/FORUM Alumni. Particular attention was also paid to the use of web 2.0 tools for professional community building, the

importance of moderating/facilitating the online platforms and understanding of ethical/security issues related to online platforms. The training exposed the students to useful practical exercises and group discussions.

