

RUFORUM MONTHLY

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

SPECIAL MONTHLY EDITION FOCUSING ON KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AND THE ROLE OF INFORMATION MANAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION IN THE RUFORUM NETWORK

This month we bring you an account of the RUFORUM Secretariat's ICT Program which began in 2009 as a result of funding that was received from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, resulting in the expansion of the overall RUFORUM Secretariat activities. The ICT Program prioritizes a number of key intervention areas and they include: (i) supporting the RUFORUM Universities to create enabling ICT and E-learning environments (ii) developing and supporting knowledge sharing platforms (iii) supporting the implementation of computerised secretariat-wide management information systems (iv) supporting platforms for collaboration to facilitate the RUFORUM Network activities (v) compiling ICT related best practices from the network and sharing them (vi) piloting the implementation of e-learning and e-content/open educational resources development (vii) facilitating capacity building in e-learning, information literacy and related emerging skills.

An insight into the RUFORUM network e-learning experiences



Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (Kenya), Egerton University (Kenya), Mekelle University (Ethiopia), Haramaya University (Ethiopia) and the University of Nairobi (Kenya) recently participated in a RUFORUM organized e-content writing retreat from the 26th to the 28th of April 2011. The participants singled out the following important issues in relation to the status of e-learning in their universities:

1. Trends are changing and the students are driving most of the e-learning initiatives in RUFORUM member universities. However the pace of e-learning implementation is very slow and individual lecturer efforts still dominate the few success stories.
2. The major challenge with e-learning implementation is managing change amidst the negative attitudes that exist towards e-learning. We therefore need to build the capacities of the identified champions and support young academic staff to

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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

10th African Crop Science Society Conference. 10 - 13 October 2011 Maputo, Mozambique

Third RUFORUM Biennial Conference. 24-28 September, 2012 Dar-es-Salaam- Tanzania

Innovations in Extension and Advisory Services International Conference. 15-18 November, 2011 Nairobi-Kenya

RUFORUM Annual General Meeting (AGM). 29 - 30 August, 2011 Lilongwe, Malawi.

More information on RUFORUM activities can be accessed on the RUFORUM BLOG at <http://ruforum.wordpress.com>



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drive the vision for e-learning and its implementation.

3. The institutionalization of e-learning in RUFORUM universities is still a major challenge. E-learning policies and e-learning strategies are still non-existent in most universities and they are a critical success factor for e-learning implementation.

4. Some RUFORUM Universities have set up E-learning Units but have not followed up to support these units with budgets for ICT related infrastructure and human resources.

5. As we develop electronic content there is need for a strong emphasis on contextualizing the e-content by using African generated and specific case studies and examples. This is very critical for documenting African knowledge and experiences.

6. RUFORUM Universities need to put in place strategies for managing knowledge - specifically tacit knowledge that is lost when university staff leave the institution.

Developing The Network's Capacity To Create OERs

RUFORUM network universities have been involved in a number of initiatives whose aim is to digitize agricultural teaching materials and then eventually share them as



Above Participants who attended the E-content writing workshop in Kampala, Uganda

open educational resources:

1. Resources were pooled from the Association of African Universities and Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to fund e-content development for 8 MSc Agricultural Information & Communication Management courses and 5 PhD Aquaculture & Fisheries Science courses. Egerton University, Bunda College of Agriculture, Haramaya University and University of Nairobi participated in this project. A total of 169 topics have been developed and have gone through the initial subject matter peer review. After the writers implement the suggested corrections, the courses will go through pedagogy review and language/style review – and will eventually be published.

2. Haramaya University, Moi University and Makerere University are engaged in the AgShare pilot projects that have resulted in the development of a number of open educational resources in the areas of Agricultural Economics, Perspectives on Agricultural Extension and Dairy Production. The project involves Creative Common's ccLearn, FLOSS4Edu, South African Institute for Distance Education (Saide) OER Africa and Michigan State University. The project places emphasis on engaging a wide range of stakeholders - NGOs, extension and other stakeholders in agricultural value chains - and the compilation of real case studies to add value to teaching and learn-

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ing. These case studies form part of what is shared as open educational resources.

3. Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture & Technology, Haramaya University, Mekelle University, University of Nairobi and Egerton University are engaged in a follow-up project to develop e-content for the MSc Research Methods and MSc Agricultural Information & Communication Management post-graduate programs. This initiative is funded from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and to date a total of 57 topics have been digitized. The writing of this content is scheduled to be completed in August 2011, after which it will go through a peer review process.

12 Reasons Why Academics Will Digitize Their Teaching Materials

We recently asked a cross-section of agricultural faculty what they see as the benefit of digitizing their teaching materials. Identifying the benefits of e-content development to academic faculty members as individuals could help us motivate more faculty members to develop e-content. This is what they had to say:

1. My teaching function will be simplified and I will save time in terms of material preparation because content that is digitized is easier to update.



Above: A team from Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology in the break away sessions during the recent E-Learning retreat in Kampala, Uganda

2. I will be able to market and profile myself as a professional through my published online content. I will also keep up to date with current events.
3. Digitization will enable me to reach out to wider and larger audiences and I do not need to be physically in class. My colleagues could also facilitate my sessions if I am not available.
4. It will increase my effectiveness through content delivery because I can engage better with students and monitor their progress.
5. The process of digitization structures my thinking as I develop the teaching materials. E-content development will therefore ensure quality in my content development process because I am forced to plan my lessons in a logical manner.
6. It enables me to give individual attention to my students and allows me to manage continuous assessments for large classes.
7. Digitization facilitates the documentation and retrieval of my content. Sharing my content will enhance the peer reviewing of my work.
8. It minimizes the paper work which cannot be easily shared. I believe e-content will promote student freedom in terms of feedback on the learning process.
9. It allows me to share the content and therefore contribute to the global knowledge repositories. Sharing will help me improve the content because of it being available

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from anywhere.

10. It will enable the learners to interact with my materials as many times as they need.

11. Digitization improves the content reflection processes – leading to continuous improvement. Well designed content ensures sustained interest and engages the learners more effectively.

12. Digitization helps me to create comprehensive teaching materials – I can also develop my materials to be dynamic in order to increase the variety of learning experiences.

FANTASY or REALITY – Creating Enabling ICT Environments in RUFORUM Universities

The 2009 Situation Analysis of ICT Capability and Infrastructure in RUFORUM Universities identified a number of promising initiatives by our universities to harness the emerging ICT opportunities for teaching, learning, research and collaboration. A number of gaps were also identified. One of the recommendations for follow up by the RUFORUM Secretariat was supporting the universities to create enabling ICT and E-learning environments for the successful integration of ICT opportunities to the core business of the universities. The development of e-learning policies and e-learning strategies



Above: Lecturers who attended the capacity Building Workshop at Egerton University

was rated as a top priority for the universities and for the Secretariat to support.

Lessons from Egerton University

The RUFORUM ICT Unit has made several efforts to share the recommendations of the ICT Situation Analysis report through the RUFORUM website and scheduled network meetings and conferences.

Egerton University is championing the development of e-learning policies, e-learning strategies and prioritizing capacity building for e-learning for her academic faculty members. The e-learning policy and e-learning strategy have been drafted and are due to be reviewed and adopted through the university processes. The university engaged Mr Nicholas Kimolo of Futuristic Ltd to conduct four (4) e-learning capacity building workshops on the development and publishing of digital educational

materials for online and offline learning. These workshops aim to build capacities of at least 100 academic faculty members from Egerton University. The first workshop was conducted at the Egerton University Njoro Campus in Kenya from 4th - 8th April 2011.

A Review of Progress – Status of E-learning Policies & E-learning Strategies

In April 2011, seven RUFORUM member universities participated in a workshop that focused on developing E-learning Policies & E-learning Strategies. Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture & Technology, Haramaya University, Mekelle University, Egerton University, Chepkoilel University College (part of Moi University), Bunda College of Agriculture and Uganda Martyrs University participated in this two-day work-

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shop that was held in Kampala, Uganda.

A practical and simple approach was used to achieve the following workshop objectives:

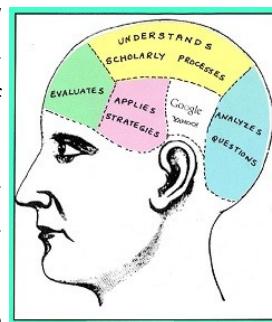
- A review of the 2009 RUFORUM ICT Situation Analysis report as it relates to the use of ICT by Agricultural Faculties and the status of E-learning Policies and E-learning Strategies
- An evaluation of the progress made by the participating universities in developing and implementing E-learning Policies and E-learning Strategies
- Sharing experiences on E-learning Policy and E-learning Strategy Formulation and Implementation - using Egerton University as a case study.
- Development of feedback reports to University Management of the participating universities informing them about the status of E-learning Policies and E-learning Strategies in their universities

Only one university out of the seven participating universities had made progress in designing an e-learning policy and e-learning strategy. Formal communication was made to the University Management of the seven participating universities giving them feedback on their progress. The participants also suggested a num-

ber of interventions for the Secretariat to consider as a way of supporting the development of e-learning policies and strategies. Participants also agreed on a "checklist" for the components of an ideal E-learning Policy and they also carried out a stakeholder analysis for e-learning implementation in a university.

Capacity Building for Information Literacy — the Role of Institutionalization

The 2009 ICT Situation Analysis of ICT Capability and Infrastructure in RUFORUM Universities identified gaps in information literacy skills of faculties of agriculture in RUFORUM universities.



[The above image is credited to: sites.google.com]

We found out that the majority of the universities are carrying out various versions of information literacy training, the curricula for this training is not standard across the universities, the roles in terms of responsibility for conducting this training have not been clarified and the universities have not institutionalized information literacy training.

The American Library Association's (ALA) Presidential Committee on Information Literacy, Final

Report states that "To be information literate, a person must be able to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information" (1989).

RUFORUM and ITOCA (Information & Training Outreach Centre for Africa) are finalising discussions for collaboration in the delivery of Information Literacy Training for selected RUFORUM Universities. A tentative schedule for training in Zambia, Mozambique and Ethiopia has been agreed (spanning August 2011 to October 2011)

The "Train the Trainer" approach assumes that the trained champions will be motivated sufficiently enough to lead the institutionalization of Information Literacy Training. For the training programs that we will carry out with ITOCA, particular attention will be paid towards following up and ensuring that the universities enact structures to support the institutionalization of information literacy training. Institutionalization is very important for the sustainability of all the RUFORUM Secretariat interventions.

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EMERGING ICT-RELATED BEST PRACTICES

The last 27 months of implementing the priority strategic objectives of the ICT Program have taught us a number of valuable lessons in the areas of e-learning, managing ICT projects and managing emerging ICT tools:

E-learning - “A Quality Assurance Tool”

A documented process for supporting e-learning implementation provides quality check mechanisms that are important for assuring quality in the implementation of any e-learning project.

There is a need to clearly demarcate the following processes in any e-learning project:

1. The development of policies and strategies for e-learning within the university
2. Basic Level Training for digital literacy
3. Writing Retreats to facilitate the actual writing of the content
4. The Standardization of Templates for writing and organizing the digital content. These must be simple and easy to follow.
5. Intermediate Level Training in the use of Learning Management Systems
6. Advanced Level Training of facilitators on how to engage the

learners effectively in an online environment

7. Peer Reviewing of the digitized content at three levels: subject matter review, pedagogical review and language / writing style review

The Quality Assurance checks are implemented during the annual review of policies and strategies, the feedback from the training programs, the standardized e-content templates and the peer review process – with feedback iterations between the reviewers and the writers.

Managing ICT Projects

1. When working with partners it is good practice to bring the partners on board from the beginning.
2. A contractual agreement and modest honorariums for developing the digital content are necessary but will not determine the success of the project. It is more important to ensure that the lecturers understand what value digitization will bring for them if they engaged in digitizing their teaching materials.
3. Project Management: The scheduling of project activities needs to be well planned in line with the university calendars; the definition of clear roles is important and qualified technical people must be identified ahead of the implementation.

How To Get The Most Out Of Online Social Networks

Online Social Networks have taken the majority of us by storm. They emerged as a result of web 2.0 technologies that revolutionized information generation and ownership on dynamic websites.

It is estimated that Facebook has more than 500 million active users, 50% of the active users log on to Facebook in any given day, an average Facebook user has 130 friends and people spend over 700 billion minutes per month on Facebook!



[The above image is credited to: jscreationzs / FreeDigitalPhotos.net]

It follows that online social networking platforms like Facebook, Plaxo, LinkedIn, MySpace, hi5, Netlog, Bebo, Zorpia, Habbo, PerfSpot, Orkut, Friendster cannot be ignored in terms of their potential to link people and facilitate a variety of collaborative activities.

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We have learnt the following in relation to managing online social networking groups for the RUFORUM network:

- It is advisable to carry out a survey on membership of our stakeholders in identified online social networks as this will save the efforts and time of designing an online platform from scratch. RUFORUM as a network can effectively ride on the existing online platforms.
- An online social network platform (such as the RUFORUM alumni Facebook group) needs a facilitator to maintain the momentum and to keep the members engaged.
- It is important to define the objectives of any online groups, the time frame for the group and the schedule of discussions. The rules for interaction must also be very clear in order to eliminate improper behaviour.
- The staff of RUFORUM member universities and other stakeholders would benefit from training programs focussing on creating awareness on the hazards of online social networks. As with most things in life there are opportunities and there are risks and we need to eliminate needless risks mainly related to the vulnerability of children, ethical issues, scams, privacy

and online reputation versus employment.

Looking Ahead: The Future for ICT and African Agriculture

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID)'s project on Fostering Agriculture Competitiveness Employing Information Communication Technologies (FACET) offers on-demand field support to help USAID missions with the challenges of using ICT interventions in agricultural development.



[This image is credited to: woodstock-farms.com]

In a briefing paper entitled "African Agriculture and ICT: An Overview" written by Judy Payne of USAID and Steve McCarthy of ACDI/VOCA, they advise that the following are the most important areas for ICT interventions in African Agriculture:

- Using ICT to facilitate access to market information distribution and supply chain management and traceability
- Enhancing financial services through mobile payments and mobile banking
- Supporting the farm extension

services, access to sector experience, research, and other resource information

- Facilitating commodity exchanges through mechanisms such as warehouse receipt systems

For the full briefing paper, giving examples of ICT implementation in African Agriculture please access it from <http://microlinks.kdil.org/>

Did you know?

103 former RUFORUM students have joined the Alumni Group on Facebook

On average **4,174** people visit the RUFORUM website per month

We are currently registering **42,178** hits on average per month on the RUFORUM website

1,300 people have created user accounts on the RUFORUM website

RUFORUM: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Qn: How can an Institution become a member of RUFORUM?

Ans: RUFORUM is a member-based organization of Universities. Membership is by application by individual universities, who must have in place an ongoing Post-graduate (M.Sc. & PhD in agricultural related sciences) training programme. However, RUFORUM will consider requests for jump-starting post-graduate training and building human-resource (at PhD level) for needy universities to start post graduate training.

Qn: Is RUFORUM a Rockefeller Foundation Programme?

Ans: No! While it is true that RUFORUM evolved from the Rockefeller Foundation's Programme Forum on Agricultural Resource Husbandry (FORUM) it is not a Rockefeller Foundation Programme. RUFORUM applies for grants from the Rockefeller Foundation just like other organizations or institutions do.

Qn: Who is eligible for RUFORUM grant application?

Ans: RUFORUM operates two grants systems a) Nurturing Institutional Grants to respond to specific institutional needs or gap areas. The applicants are usually institutional leaders, such as Heads of Departments or Deans, b) Competitive Grant System (CGS): The lead applicants (Principle Investigators-PIs) must be PhD holders (or Professors without PhD) working in one of the RUFORUM member universities. But they must have at least one partner from outside the applicant's universities who may not have a PhD and not necessarily from the country or region.

Qn: Why are Masters holders not eligible for RUFORUM grants?

Ans: The RUFORUM grants awarded under especially the CGS are to support M.Sc. and PhD training. It is now a basic requirement in most universities in the region that for one to supervise M.Sc. or for that

matter PhD candidates, he/she must have a PhD. However, Masters degree holders can be partners in a project where the Principle Investigator is a PhD holder.

Qn: Are RUFORUM activities only limited to Eastern, Central and Southern Africa?

Ans: While it is true that as of now, RUFORUM member universities are primarily from the Eastern, Central and Southern Africa region, some RUFORUM activities span beyond the region. For example, RUFORUM has projects in Benin and Ghana (West Africa)

Qn: As a student can I apply directly to the RUFORUM Secretariat for a scholarship or research support?

Ans: No: the grants are awarded to the universities who then award scholarships to the students. However, the Secretariat periodically posts scholarship announcements on its website (www.ruforum.org)

Qn: When are proposals due?

Ans: Proposals are received throughout the year, but are considered usually twice, February-March and August-September, depending on availability of funding. However, special grant announcements may have specific deadlines: please periodically check the RUFORUM Website

Qn: What are the basic requirements for a RUFORUM grant?

Ans: The Principle Investigator must meet the eligibility criteria; the proposal must comply with the proposal submission guidelines; the proposal must involve training of at least 2 Masters students; and there must be a partner from outside the University team. The grant ceilings are variable, depending on the call, but usually \$60,000 to support research and training of at least 2 Masters students.