

C M A A E N E W S

Issue Number Ten , April, 2008

The Newsletter of the Collaborative Master of Science in Agricultural and Applied Economics

Dear readers,

Let me take this opportunity to welcome you to our tenth newsletter. It is my great hope that you found the ninth issue helpful in updating you on the progress we have so far made in implementing the CMAAE Program. The program's success is crucial to developing the capacity to undertake training, research and suggesting sound, implementable policy options on various issues affecting Agriculture in Africa. I hope that you will benefit from this information and share it with other interested friends and colleagues. For any inquiry about the program, please feel free to write, call or visit the program secretariat using the addresses listed at the back page.

Willis Oluoch –Kosura, Program Director

Developing capacity of network Instructors: CMAAE Research Methods retooling workshop



Retooling Workshop participants in a group photo during the opening ceremony

The program held its second retooling workshop from 1st to 2nd of April, 2008. The purpose of the workshop was to develop a common understanding on how to effectively deliver a research methodology curriculum and how to ensure that at the end of the course, students can prepare a researchable topic or concept note. Fifteen of the network departments, with the exception of Alemaya University (Ethiopia), "I found the sharing of experiences and detailed discussions of were represented. concepts in some cases very helpful and educative"

The workshop addressed a number of issues that currently impact the quality of research proposals put forward by the CMAAE students. Participants then made suggestions and recommendations. Among the issues noted were: Instructors observed that the existing CMAAE Research Methodology curriculum meets the needs of potential graduate students in terms of cover-

age and rigor. However, the curriculum is over-elaborate making it difficult to adequately cover all topics within the total stipulated hours of the semester and to produce a graduate who fully understands the research process and be able to practically apply the concepts learnt in a field setting.

The curriculum has some overlaps with econometrics and statistics which

makes some topics repetitive for the same program.

The course objectives and the expected learning outcomes do not explicitly show that the students should have a proposal by the end of the course.

The workshop facilitator used among others, the University of Pretoria Research Methodology by distance learn-

Contents

Developing capacity of network instructors: Research methods retooling workshop

Program news: CMAAE Website on focus

Program news: Bunda College of Agriculture to offer core courses

Admission of fourth cohort students

African Agriculture on Focus: How ICT can make a difference in agricultural livelihoods in Africa

News from participating departments: Network member receives 2008 alumni Award

Bunda College of Agriculture on focus

ing course model to refocus the course curriculum. The workshop concluded that the University of Pretoria Research Methodology by distance learning is a novel model worth emulating. The approach is practical as it allows students do something related to their research every week and there is involvement of all lecturers concerned. The approach helps to make learning relevant and useful because it focuses on the production of a draft proposal, which the students are actually interested in.

The workshop was appreciated by the course instructors who indicated that it had exposed them to additional information in the field, and that the deliberations would be helpful in teaching the course. In addition a common functional framework for preparing proposals was developed to aid students and ensure that the quality of proposals is uniform and comparable quality wise in all the network departments.

The program plans to hold two retooling workshops in this Financial Year. We hope that these initiatives will not only improve the quality of instruction at the network departments, but also provide an avenue for networking and sharing ideas in the network.

WWW.Agriculturaleconomics.net the one stop information source on CMAAE activities and link to related sites

Have you been to the CMAAE website? Did you know that the site has everything you may need to know about the program? Know:

- ⇒ The planned program activities: Available on the **Schedule** drop down section and specify the dates for the major program activities including dates for student admissions, retooling workshops, the Shared Facility for specialization and Electives (SFSE), among others.
- ⇒ Student profiles: The section summarizes the details of the enrolled students, including their university, first degree, prior engagements, and research interests
- ⇒ Discussion forum: Still on a pilot run, the forum can be used by both

students and instructors to discuss any topic of relevance. These may include, but not limited to current pertinent issues in Agricultural and Applied Economics in the continent. The section can also be used to provide feedback to the program secretariat for improvement.

- ⇒ Links to other related sites - including for scholarships (PhD, MSc.), training (short courses), journals, job opportunities, among others
- ⇒ Information on participating departments, among others
- ⇒ Plans are underway to improve the site and to develop an alumni section. The alumni section will showcase the research findings from the students' thesis research. We hope that this will improve policy formulation in the region of focus.

WWW.agricultureconomics.net

Progress on program implementation

Info on departments active in the program

Current pertinent issues on Agricultural and Applied Economics in the continent

Enrolled students' profile

In the future:

Research activities

Networking and collaboration

CMAAE on an expansion trail: Bunda College of Agriculture to offer core courses

The network departments that offer core courses have increased to six. Bunda College of Agriculture (University of Malawi) will finally admit its first batch of CMAAE students in the 2008/09 Academic Year. This is welcome news to the network members, given the significance of the department in the region, and demand for the program by students in the country. The operationalization of accreditation of the department follows recommendations of the Mid Term Evaluation. It is also worth noting that students from Ma-

lawi form the majority of non national students in the program, and have taken up about 46% of the total non national scholarships issued to date. This development will to all intents and purposes free up a number of scholarships which may be taken up by other countries without accredited departments, to increase regional coverage. The college is reputed to have a strong Agricultural Economics department, and currently hosts a regional PhD program in the discipline. This development is expected to increase overall student enrollment to 70 at the minimum, and thus contribute to the

program goal of increasing the number of professionals in the region, who are capable of formulating, implementing, and researching policies in the continent. To ensure that the department is adequately prepared to admit students, the program secretariat will be releasing the mandatory gearing up grant in June, 2008. The grant, released upon self evaluation by the department, will mainly facilitate the acquisition of ICT media to enable access to online materials for instruction and reference. This is expected to raised the quality of instruction and research in the department.

Admission of fourth cohort students

The admission process is now on for the fourth cohort students. This follows advertisements in all the accredited departments (those offering CMAAE core courses) in April. In the past (last three Academic Years), we have received more qualified applicants than the available spaces. However, the numbers enrolling have averaged 90%. This has mainly been attributed to inability to raise the required fee supplement charged by the admitting departments.

To address the problem, the secretariat has in the recent past approached various donors for scholarship support. We are happy to report that a number of donors have agreed to provide scholarships from this coming Academic Year.

These include:

- ⇒ The German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD)
- ⇒ Flora and Hewlett Foundation
- ⇒ International Development Research Institute (IDRC), and
- ⇒ The African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF)

We greatly appreciate the support from these organizations, and believe that their support will immensely contribute to the CMAAE ultimate goal.

We also wish to inform prospective students to make direct application enquiries to the

departments that offer the core courses. The addresses of the contact persons are:

- ⇒ Makerere University (Dr. Bernard Bashaasha HOD; aspsmuk@infocom.co.ug)
- ⇒ University of Nairobi (Dr Rose Nyikal HOD; ranyikal@mail.uonbi.ac.ke)
- ⇒ University of Zimbabwe (Dr Lovemore Rugube, HOD; lrugube@agric.uz.ac.zw)
- ⇒ Egerton University (Dr. Benjamin Mutai, HOD; bkmutai@yahoo.com)
- ⇒ University of Pretoria (Prof. Johann Kirsten, HOD ;johann.kirsten@up.ac.za)
- ⇒ Bunda College of Agriculture (Dr. Abdi Edriss, HoD); (Abdikhalil@yahoo.com)

How ICT can make a difference in agricultural livelihoods in Africa

The world today is an "information society". There is an ever-increasing use of information in all aspects of human activity. Historically, food security and economic development depend on access to information, and learning through knowledge management and exchange. In Africa, agriculture is an important sector with the majority of the rural population depending on it. The sector however faces major challenges of enhancing production in a situation of a deteriorating natural resource base. The growing demand for agricultural products, however, also offers opportunities for producers to sustain and improve their livelihoods. Information and communication Technologies (ICT) play an important role in addressing these challenges and uplifting the livelihoods of the rural poor. The next series of articles in our newsletters will explore the potential contribution of ICT to the livelihoods of small-scale farmers and the efficiency of the agricultural sector in the continent, and draw attention to some successes in the continent. We start by highlighting the various contributions that ICT could make and the structures that need to be put in place to ensure its success as identified by the International Institute for Communication and Development (IICD)

Opportunities and challenges in the agricultural sector : The agricultural sector is confronted with the major challenge of increasing production to feed a growing and increasingly prosperous population in a situation of decreasing availability of natural resources. Factors of particular concern are water shortages, declining soil fertility, effects of climate change and rapid decrease of fertile agricultural lands due to urbanization. However, the growing demand, including for higher quality products, also offers opportunities for improving the livelihoods of rural communities. Realizing these opportunities requires compliance with more stringent quality standards and regulations for the production and handling of agricultural produce. New approaches and technical innovations are required to cope with these challenges and to enhance the livelihoods of the rural population. The role of ICT to enhance food security and support rural livelihoods is increasingly recognized and was officially endorsed at the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) 2003-2005. This includes the use of computers, internet, geographical information systems, mobile phones, as well as traditional media such as radio or TV, among others. Although it is a relatively new phenomenon, evidence of the contribution of ICT to agricultural development and poverty alleviation is becoming increasingly available. Since 1998, IICD has been involved in projects and policy trajectories and consistently monitors the progress and impact of the use of ICT. ICT has specifically been used in a number of areas. These are enumerated below.

Enhancing agricultural production: Increasing the efficiency, productivity and sustainability of small-scale farms is an area where ICT can make a significant contribution. Farming involves risks and uncertainties, with farmers facing many threats from poor soils, drought, erosion and pests. Key improvements stem from information about pest and disease control, especially early warning systems, new varieties, new ways to optimize production and regulations for quality control, by improving agricultural extension through the use of ICT.

Improving market access: Awareness of up-to-date market information on prices for commodities, inputs and consumer trends can improve farmers' livelihoods substantially and have a dramatic impact on their negotiating position. Such information is instrumental in making decisions about future crops and commodities and about the best time and place to sell and buy goods. In many countries, initiatives have appeared that seek to address this issue. Simple websites to match offer and demand of agricultural produce are a start of more complex agricultural trade systems. These sites tend to evolve from local selling/ buying websites and price-information systems, to systems offering marketing and trading functions. Typically, price information is collected at the main regional markets and stored in a central database. The information is published on a website, accessible to farmers via information centers. To reach a wider audience, information is broadcast via rural radio, TV or mobile phone, thereby creating a 'level playing field' between producers and traders in a re-

gion. The sustainability of these systems requires attention, with an important role for the private sector and organized producer groups.

Web-based trading platforms offering one-stop shop facilities are emerging, especially for main commodities. In recent years, short message and text services have taken up and effectively deliver prices and trading information via mobile phone to farmers, for instance in Senegal, Kenya, Benin, and Zambia, among other countries. Analyses of impacts of these systems have concluded that they ensure a fair income for producers and a steady supply of raw materials for the mills.

Capacity-building and empowerment: Communities and farmer organizations can be helped through the use of ICTs to strengthen their own capacities and better represent their constituencies when negotiating input and output prices, land claims, resource rights and infrastructure projects. ICT enables rural communities to interact with other stakeholders, thus reducing social isolation. It widens the perspective of local communities in terms of national or global developments, opens up new business opportunities and allows easier contact with friends and relatives. A role is also played by ICT in making processes more efficient and transparent. It helps in making laws and land titles more accessible. Global Positioning Systems (GPS) linked to Geographical Information Systems (GIS), digital cameras and internet, help rural communities to document and communicate their situation.

Conditions for a conducive enabling environment: For information and knowledge to be effectively used by rural communities, several conditions need to be met. These include: Generation of relevant knowledge and making it accessible; presentation of the information in an appropriate format in order to be effectively used by rural communities; mechanisms need to be put in place to ensure learning and information sharing (i.e. institutional mechanisms and human capacity to link rural communities); building /enhancing rural access and exchange mechanisms through installation of appropriate infrastructure, among others.

Recommendations

Based on experiences and trends, the implementation of the following recommendations can help realize the full potential of ICT in agriculture and improve rural livelihoods: **Foster strategies and programs with a long-term perspective.** ICT should be integrated into agricultural sector policies and lead to supportive programs; **Create multi-stakeholder mechanisms for learning.** Institutional mechanisms, especially multi-stakeholder networks, should be in place to foster learning and exchange of information at various levels; **Raise awareness on the role of ICT4D in poverty alleviation.** Since the use of ICT in agriculture is still a new and rapidly changing area, there is a need to raise awareness among governments, other national stakeholders and the international donor community on the potential; **Ensure availability and access to relevant information by:** Putting policies into place that systematically capture local knowledge, ensure appropriate research agenda setting and support the functioning of intermediary organizations; Digitize information of various stakeholders and stimulate the use of shared web-based platforms; Fostering the adaptation of information into formats and languages relevant for rural users; and Fostering public-private partnerships to make market and business information accessible: and by **Enhancing rural access to ICT media.**

Adapted From: How ICT can make a difference in Agricultural livelihoods. By Jac Stienen with Wietse Bruinsma and Frans Neuman, International Institute for communication and Development (IICD), 2007.

NEWS FROM PARTICIPATING DEPARTMENTS

Network member receives 2008 Alumni Award



The AAEEN family warmly congratulates Dr. Bernard Bashaasha, the immediate former chairman of the CMAAE Academic Board, and the current chair of the Department of Agricultural Economics and Agribusiness, Makerere University, for being awarded the 2008 International Alumni Award by the Ohio State University.

The award is bestowed on former international students of Ohio

State University's College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences who participate in capacity-building projects administered by the college's International Programs in Agriculture. Dr. Bashaasha has been an instrument of change in Uganda and the region at large. He served as the first chairman of the CMAAE Academic Board and steered the board during the planning phase and at the beginning of the implementation phase. Dr. Bashaasha was indeed central to the planning phase, and guided the curriculum development very successfully.

Your recognition is in itself, an achievement by the CMAAE. We hope that this will be the first among many such honors.

Bunda College of Agriculture on Focus

Bunda College of Agriculture is one of the five constituent Colleges of the University of Malawi. It was established in 1967 as a multi-disciplinary University College to produce middle-level personnel for the agricultural industry. The focus then was to train Ordinary level (O-level) school leavers in basic crop and livestock production and extension methods in order to reach the smallholder farmers who produce an estimated 80% of food in Malawi. The objective was to improve food production, food security and nutrition of the people. While recognizing the importance of the smallholder farmers in food production, the focus has been broadened over the years to include requirements for the estate farmers. The issues of nutrition, food processing, and food engineering technologies and their transfer to farmers are also recognized as requirements for sustainable agricultural production.

The College has in the past offered certificates, Diplomas and 5-year Bachelor of Science Degree programs. Currently the College offers 4-year undergraduate programs leading to Bachelor's degree. The general aim of the undergraduate program is to train trainers, administrators and professional workers in agricultural education, research and in the planning and implementation of agricultural, agribusiness management, natural resources management and rural development programs. In addition, the College offers various postgraduate degree programs.

The college's mission is to advance and promote knowledge, skills, self-reliance and sound character for: sustainable food production and utilization; Improving income, food security and nutrition; and Conservation and management of biodiversity, the environment and natural resources. It aims to achieve its mission through the provision of information services, teaching and training, research, outreach, consultancy and sound management in response to national needs.

Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics

Currently headed by Dr. Edriss Abdi, the department has a total of 16 staff with PhDs. The CMAAE Mid Term Evaluation exercise strongly recommended the department for full accreditation based on the following facts:

- ⇒ The department now appears to be one of the strongest in the region with the possible exception of the UP. Also, in addition to its own staff it has excellent working relationships with the Centre of Agricultural and Rural Development (CARD) located on the same campus, whose staff also helps in teaching.
- ⇒ The department appears now to be retaining its staff. An incentive is that consultancies are encouraged as long as teaching commitments are not compromised
- ⇒ It already has an ongoing MSc degree in agricultural economics and has recently entered into eight-year agreement with NORAD's Programme for Masters' Students (NOMA), Makerere and the Norwegian University of Life Sciences to offer an MSc degree in Natural Resources and Development.
- ⇒ Very significantly, the department has been selected by RU-FORUM to be the Centre of Excellence for a PhD degree in Agricultural Economics.

The department has in addition contributed resource persons who have taught at the Shared Facility, and facilitated CMAAE workshops. We therefore encourage prospective students to consider Bunda College when making applications for enrollment in to the CMAAE program.

For further information, please email us at cmaae@aercafrica.org

Or write to:

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P.O Box 62882-00200 Nairobi, Kenya,

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Program website: www.agricultureconomics.net

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