Enhancing Nutrition and Food Security Through Improved Capacity of Agricultural Higher Education Institutions in East and Southern Africa

Agriculture is the driver of the economic fortunes of the economies in east and southern Africa (ESA). However despite the pivotal role the sector plays in the economies of these regions, its performance has for a long time been below its potential evidenced by frequent hunger alerts. This has been the result of many underlying factors including weak extension services and climate change among others. The contribution of agricultural higher education institutions is key in improving the performance of the agriculture sector. However, academic quality and relevance has not been fully achieved in Sub-Saharan Africa. This Project aims to increase agricultural productivity in East and Southern Africa through improving training in higher education institutions. An all-round approach is adopted where all the stakeholders in Agriculture will collaborate to strengthen teaching and research skills, leading to higher quality of agriculture graduates.

Challenge
The quality of graduates of agriculture in East and Southern Africa is often inadequate in terms of the labour market expectations. Current teaching programs tend to be highly theoretical and therefore neglect to equip the graduate with the relevant practical skills and knowhow. In addition, the majority of faculty personnel teaching agriculture are not adequately equipped with teaching, research and mentoring skills, undermining the quality of content delivery sustaining learners’ interest. As a result and exacerbated by the lack of involvement of important stakeholders in curriculum development, curricula are not adequately addressing the challenges facing the agricultural sector.

Meaningful collaborations need to be developed and sustained with long term planning and deliberate effort to maintain networks to ensure greater impact within the sector.

Focus
The project will focus on East and Southern Africa Higher education institutions teaching agriculture to improve curricula so it can be more relevant and responsive to labour market requirements as well as preparing graduates for self-employment. Existing horticulture curriculum will be revamped to benchmark with global standards and allow mobility of students and staff across East and Southern Africa to allow a richer learning experience. Staff teaching skills and curriculum development skills will be upgraded through capacity building actions and interactions with European partners to share experience. Managers of units/offices that impact on agriculture training and research will be sensitised to increase support for agriculture programmes in order to produce a proficient and highly productive workforce.

Rationale
Although agriculture has been a backbone of African economies for a long time, its full potential has not been realised due to various factors including weak extension services, climate change, and soil fertility amongst others. Agricultural higher education institutions can play a key role in improving the performance of the agriculture sector through their programs; however this important aspect has been neglected. Of great concern has also been the inability of African countries, and more so in ESA, to meet their food and nutrition requirements. As the major suppliers of trained manpower for the agricultural sector, the state of agricultural higher education institutions in the region, and the effectiveness of their training programmes, is to an extent reflected in the poor performance of the sector. Therefore, efforts to improve agricultural productivity oriented towards ensuring food security and reducing malnutrition need to integrate research and training programmes amongst other key interventions. This Project aims to strengthen training and capacity development in agriculture and is aligned to the Agriculture and Food security priority. Specifically the project contributes to the theme of enhancing nutrition and reducing malnutrition.
Programme theme(s)  
Agriculture and food security

Sector  
Agriculture

Keywords  
Agriculture, Training, Higher Education Institutions

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Method  
The Project was started with an inception meeting involving the partners and associates to explore gaps to be addressed, identify opportunities and strategies for enhancing teaching and curriculum development skills among faculty. Baseline data were collected to inform on the status of universities in ESA, considering human and physical infrastructure as well as capacity in terms of skills and facilities. Survey has been done in higher education institutions in Kenya, Uganda and Zimbabwe. Review of current curricula will be done after faculty are trained in curriculum development skills. Three reference manuals on curriculum review skills, teaching skills and strengthening of management of supporting units in Agriculture have been developed for use in East and Southern Africa.

Improving teaching methods and capacity will ensure the adoption of best practices across the participating institutions.

Results  
Key themes for relevant training in food and nutrition security will be identified and regionally harmonized horticulture curriculum developed. This will enhance student and staff mobility in the region leading to quality research. In addition, skills of academic staff strengthened in curriculum development, teaching skills/methods, and integration of modern technologies in agriculture will be strengthened. Management and administrative capacity of units supporting agriculture training will be strengthened, e.g. in grants handling and international programmes. This will lead to increased management competence as well as ability to mobilise resources to improve teaching and research quality. Engagement with stakeholders in curriculum development will be institutionalised for development and delivery of high quality training programmes that effectively tackle malnutrition and food insecurity. Moreover, existing and new inter-institutional networks will be facilitated between agricultural HEIs in ESA and the EU.