Deploying Interactive On-line Networking Platform for Improving Quality and Relevance of African University Graduates to Labour Markets

This action broadly aims at strengthening the capacities in three universities in Kenya and Uganda towards reforming graduate curricula, graduate training and education with greater participation of the agricultural labour markets and a large pool of global expertise. Currently graduates and their lecturers have limited interaction with the labour market due to a lack of effective administration and academic frameworks to open opportunities for graduates to learn practical lessons relevant to the needs of the labour market. This action targets closing this gap by deploying innovative interactive online technology networking platform to promote the institutional networking of universities and a global pool of professionals and the labour market. The platforms will enable the participating universities to efficiently and effectively supervise, mentor, track and network their graduates, graduate alumni and faculty staff within a community of researchers, academics, practicing professionals and the agricultural labour market.

Challenge
Quality of graduates is deteriorating as Universities experience overwhelming lecturer-to-student ratios and declining public funding. Many faculty staff continues to use face-to-face conventional learning, teaching and supervision approaches, but this has failed to effectively cope with the surging numbers of graduate students and is weakening quality of supervision and mentorship. The graduates have difficulties writing research publication and rejection of submitted manuscripts is high because of high level of plagiarism, improper analysis and interpretation of research data and poor presentation of results. Furthermore, the graduate alumni are insufficiently networked with their peers and mentors and fail to gain confidence of the labour market. The agricultural labour market is increasingly expressing low confidence on the graduates and demanding for more fit-for-purpose graduates, a situation that is diminishing employability of the agricultural graduates.

Focus
The project is designed to take advantage of Africa’s increased public investment in fibre optic cables and ICT upgrading to deploy user-friendly, interactive on-line technology platforms that will complement face-to-face contacts learning and to enable universities to efficiently and effectively supervise, mentor, track and network their graduates, graduate alumni and faculty staff with community of researchers, academics, practicing professionals and the agricultural labour market. The action will have quality of African University graduates enhanced through effective interactive on-line supervision, mentoring and linkage with labour markets. Ultimately, the action will have enhanced capacity of African Universities to produce high performing graduates responsive to the demands for innovations in the agricultural labour markets.

Rationale
The Agriculture and Food Security sector in Africa where respectively over 80% and 70% of the population derive livelihoods and full time employment is recording pervasive poor performance. This is exposing the growing African population to continued risk of poverty, food insecurity, youth unemployment, and environmental degradation and slowing the attainment of the MDGs, particularly 1, 7 and 8. To a large extent, this can be linked to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) producing low performing graduates who are unable to drive the agricultural innovation processes to revitalise agriculture, boost economic recovery, accelerate achievement of the 6% annual growth target set under the Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP). HEIs are vital to national innovation systems and the development of human resource base and have to foster capacity building mechanisms for delivering quality graduate education and training which is responsive to the demands of agricultural labour market.
Programme theme(s) Agriculture and food security

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Method
1. sensitise partner Universities and stakeholders, mobilise faculty and alumni participation in the project implementation;
2. Establish project governance and management organs;
3. Develop and operationalize M&E and learning framework;
4. Develop integrated on-line platform for graduates’ supervision, mentoring and tracking system;
5. Facilitate participation of agricultural labour markets in setting graduate research agenda, mentorship, internship, curriculum reforms;
6. Develop institutional frameworks to implement open supervision and mentorship programmes;
7. Establish community of practice for agricultural training and research;
8. Produce and share quality communication products.

Results
• An interactive online technology platform for supervision, mentoring and tracking of graduate students and alumni developed and deployed in African universities;
• African universities supported to improve and deliver quality market-driven graduate curricula;
• Efficient institutional framework and mechanisms for deploying open graduate supervision and mentorship set up and embraced in Africa universities;
• Online community of practice for agricultural training and research addressing mentorship and supervision needs of graduate students established, nurtured and sustained;
• Project management and coordination framework established and implemented.

Figure illustrating action institutional framework development and mechanisms for deploying open graduate supervision and mentorship platform and processes for engaging the alumni and large pool of professional