

CAPACITY BUILDING AND ACTIVITIES OF UNIVERSITY OF MALAWI'S BUNDA COLLEGE AS THEY RELATE TO GLOBAL OPEN AND AGRICULTURE UNIVERSITY (GO-FAU) PROGRAM

By

**George Yobe Kanyama Phiri, Professor of Crop Science and Principal
Bunda College, P.O. Box 219, Lilongwe, Malawi**

INTRODUCTION

Bunda College is one of the five constituent colleges of the University of Malawi. The others are Chancellor College, College of Medicine, Kamuzu College of Nursing and the Polytechnic.

The mission of the College is to advance 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

The vision of the college is to become a world class university through the provision of information services, teaching, research, consultancy and sound management in response to national and international needs.

At the dawn of independence in 1964, there was a 91% deficiency in middle level technical and extension personnel in Agriculture. Bunda College was therefore established in 1965 by the Ministry of Agriculture through a National Governing Council with the original mandate of addressing this deficiency. The College was officially incorporated into the federal system of the University of Malawi in 1967. The incorporation into the University was intended to enable the college to offer diploma and degree programs. Currently the college phased out diplomas in order to concentrate on Bs, Ms and PhD Programs in the three broad areas of Agriculture, Natural Resources, Environment and Development.

COLLEGE FACULTIES AND DEPARTMENTS

Bunda College has three faculties. These faculties are: The Faculty of Agriculture, the Faculty of Environmental Sciences and the Faculty of Development studies. The Faculty of Agriculture has five departments: Agricultural Engineering, Animal Science, Basic Science, Crop Science and Home Economics/Human Nutrition. The Environmental Sciences Faculty has Departments of Aquaculture and Fisheries Science, Forestry and Horticulture and Natural Resources Management. Departments that fall under the third Faculty of Development Studies include Agricultural and Applied Economics, Agribusiness Management, Extension and Language and Development Communication.

ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

The academic programs on offer at Bunda College are need driven. In other words, before an academic program is offered, needs assessments are conducted either nationally or regionally in order to determine the nature and extent of the demand for that program. The Faculty of Agriculture offers Bs degrees in Agriculture, Agronomy, Animal Science and Nutrition/Food science. Ms degrees include Agronomy, Animal science, Nutrition/Food science, Plant protection and Soil science. The Faculty also offers a PhD degree in Animal science. Bs and Ms degrees offered by the Faculty of Environment sciences are in the areas of Aquaculture and Fisheries Science, Forestry, Environmental Sciences, Horticulture and Natural Resources Management. The Faculty also offers a regional PhD degree in Aquaculture and Fisheries Science. The Faculty of Development Studies offers Bs degrees in Agricultural and Applied Economics, Agricultural Extension for Mid-Career Professionals, Agribusiness Management, and Agricultural Education. On the other hand the Ms Programs include Agribusiness Management, Agricultural Economics and Rural Development and Extension. The faculty also offers a Regional PhD degree program in Agricultural and Resource Economics.

CAPACITY BUILDING IN TRADITIONAL AGRICULTURE AND DISTANCE LEARNING COURSES

Undergraduate student enrolment has increased steadily from 35 in 1966 to 777 in 2007. Currently the female students make up 36% of the total undergraduate student population. In order to increase its intake the college introduced a parallel (non-residential) undergraduate program, with the non-residential student population constituting 10 % of the current total student enrolment. Another significant achievement of the college is that it has been able to attract foreign students who make up 1 % of the total population.

Bunda college has offered distant education at diploma level in collaboration with Zimbabwe Open University, under the sponsorship of the Commonwealth Youth Program. Plans are underway to introduce more distance learning programs in the near future. Like other colleges in the University of Malawi, the college also intends to revamp its curriculum in order to offer some of its courses under a modular format.

Overall the total number of graduates has increased from 23 in 1969 to 4,637 in 2006. Of this total, 2,401, 2,067, 168 and 2 are Diploma, Bs, Ms, and PhD holders, respectively. Out of the total number of students who have graduated, 18% are females.

Postgraduate programs are supported largely by scholarships from various sponsors including the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), the Rockefeller Foundation, the Icelandic International Development Agency (ICEIDA), the Norwegian Agency for Development and Cooperation (NORAD), the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM), the World Bank, the Bean/Cowpea Collaborative Research (CRSP) Program, the McKnight Foundation, GTZ, CIAT, MTSC, the constituent colleges of the University of Malawi, Mzuzu University and the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security. Currently the postgraduate student population stands at 50.

As indicated earlier, Bunda College was established primarily to build capacity in the agriculture sector. Between 1969 and 1975, the Ministry of Agriculture was the main sink of the college graduates employing more than 80% of the yearly crop of graduates. When vacancies in the Ministry of Agriculture began to fill up, however, more and more graduates started to seek employment opportunities elsewhere. For example, by 2001, the Ministry of Agriculture was able to employ only 23% of the graduates. At this time, the private sector became the largest employer absorbing 30% of the new graduates. The rest of the graduates were absorbed by the NGOs (16.8%), other ministries especially the Ministry of Education (15.7%), the statutory corporations (8.2%), International organizations (3.8%), and others including the self employed (0.5%).

Bunda College has also contributed to capacity building of the University of Malawi especially the college itself. With the increase in the number of the undergraduate and postgraduate programs, the majority of the faculty members of staff take their Bs and Ms Degrees at Bunda College before they are sent abroad for PhD training. The College has also contributed to capacity building of other universities in Eastern and Southern Africa.

RELEVANCE OF PROGRAMS TO CGIAR CENTERS MANDATES AND MISSION

From the late 1980s to the present, Bunda College has forged memoranda of understanding with various CG centers. These memoranda have been aimed at fostering staff exchange, joint supervision of postgraduate students, sharing of research, teaching and learning resources. For Example, IFPRI and Bunda College are credited for the introduction of an Ms Degree in Agricultural Economics in the Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics. Through this venture a number of policy related research projects were conducted, with a number of Ms Students having acquired the degrees and papers published in reputed journals. The collaboration between Bunda College and the World Agro forestry Center takes the form of joint planning and implementation of research protocols, joint student supervision and knowledge generation and sharing. Bunda College has been made a center of excellence in Agro forestry education through its working relationship with the Africa Network for Agro forestry Education (ANAFE). An MOU also exists between Bunda College and the World Fish Center which also enables the two institutions to collaborate in research, staff exchange, and joint student supervision. The foregoing collaborations clearly demonstrate the existence of a strong working relationship between Bunda College and CG centers.

GO-FAU CONTRIBUTION TO CAPACITY BUILDING OF BUNDA COLLEGE

There is potential for GO-FAU program to contribute to content development and capacity building at Bunda College. For instance the college has weak capacity in distance learning. It is envisaged that through GO-FAU program, the college can develop e-learning resources for adequately mounting its modular courses. It is also anticipated that through the GO-FAU program arrangement the staff/student exchange programs will be promoted. One of the areas that need attention is funding of research. It is hoped that

GO-FAU program will facilitate sourcing of funds from donors especially the Gates Foundation.

OTHER INITIATIVES UNDERTAKEN BY BUNDA COLLEGE

Since the mid 1990s, Bunda College has been engaged in several initiatives at National, Regional and International levels. At the local level the college has collaborated with the Ministry of Agriculture in the development of policies, such as the Malawi Agricultural Sector Development Program (MASIP) the Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (MPRSP), and the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS). All initiatives have an agricultural component, with detail prioritization of activities for boosting growth and productivity and ultimately reduce poverty among the vulnerable households. The college is also involved in the development of the initiative known as Malawi Agricultural Development Program (MADP). The initiative is funded by the World Bank and has similar objectives to the MASIP, MPRSP and MGDS.

At the Regional, level Bunda College is participating in capacity building initiatives under the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM). The initiative is aimed at training of postgraduates at the Ms and PhD Levels. The initiative provides Research project funds and Nurturing Grants for these efforts. The initiative also facilitates the development of regional degree program. For example Bunda College is hosting two Regional PhD programs, such as the Regional PhD in Agricultural and Resource Economics and the Regional PhD in Aquaculture and Fisheries Sciences.

At the International level the College is hosting two programs involving research and capacity building. The Agricultural Research and Development Program is a North-South collaboration between Bunda College and the Norwegian University of Life Sciences (UMB). The initiative operates a competitive Grant System (CGS). The Bunda College Capacity Program is primarily aimed at building capacity of the college. It was borne out of need to replace those members of staff who are retiring or have left the college for diaspora.

CONCLUSION

The foregoing clearly demonstrates that Bunda College is an active player in capacity building. Its long history of involvement with members of the CGIAR has enriched its competence in capacity building. There is a potential for the GO-FAU program to contribute to curriculum development and strengthening institutional capacity of Bunda College.