

# **Collaborative Masters Program in Agricultural and Applied Economics (CMAAE) in Eastern, Central and Southern Africa And The Global Open Food and Agriculture University (GO-FAU) Program**

The CMAAE program aims to equip professionals with knowledge and skills essential for transforming the currently underdeveloped agro-food sectors and rural economies of Eastern, Central and Southern Africa (ECA) to perform well in an environmentally sustainable fashion. Its underlying premise is that such highly trained local professionals must address the challenges posed by far reaching changes in global and local economies, technology, and marketing by adapting their advanced knowledge and methods to the particular institutional, political and economic circumstances of the region. The program was started in response to the identified capacity deficit for agricultural policy research and analysis in the East Central and Southern Africa region (Obwona and Norman, 2001). In addition, the study revealed that most of the training institutions in the region lack the capacity for training and research necessary for effective graduate training.

The CMAAE program's broad objectives are:

1. To strengthen the region's capacity to generate skills and knowledge essential for the development of agriculture and the rural economy. Each participating department constitutes an important national asset for creating new knowledge through research, analysis of specific issues for government and industry, and training badly needed professionals. The program's other objective is to strengthen these institutions, with specific reference to their departments of agricultural economics.
2. To put in place a program that whilst conforming to international "best practices", also adapts to the region's specific features. Of particular note is the challenge posed by shortcomings in institutions, markets and public policy. Graduates from the program must acquire the capacity to adapt knowledge and skills to the problems at hand, rather than the reverse.

The program has been modeled to offer relatively low cost solutions to some of the challenges highlighted above. In the development of the course curriculum, the program employed wide consultations with all stakeholders, including the job market (private sector, public sector, and NGOs), regional and international consultants, to ensure that course content is demand/need based, and also measures up to the international best standards. The program has further instituted self monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure the curriculum maintains the set standards. It has also slotted periodic curriculum review by both course instructors and external consultants within its implementation framework. Students also get the opportunity to evaluate all the course lecturers. The program has also established linkages with other international initiatives, such as the Global Open Food and Agriculture University (GOFAU) program to inform course content.

To ensure access to high quality learning materials, research methodologies and new findings is maintained, the program plans to introduce e-learning through Information Communications Technology (ICT) by collaborating with other institutions. In addition, all accredited departments have internet connectivity, and students can access current learning materials and research papers from electronic libraries including The Essential Agricultural Electronic Library (TEAL), Access to Global Online Research in Agriculture (AGORA), AgEcon online library of the Michigan State University, among others.

## **Program core activities**

- Shared Facility for Specialization and Electives (SFSE): Students undertake fields of specialized study at the shared facility. They either specialize in Agriculture and Rural Development; Agricultural Policy and Trade; Agribusiness Management; and Environment and Natural Resource Management

by taking a foundation course and related electives. In addition, a compulsory course in Institutional and Behavioral Economics is taught. This is an innovative course that is designed to enable students to better adapt more conventional analysis to the political and economic realities of the region and to better understand and contribute in addressing the institutional failures in the countries in the region. These fields were identified at the stakeholders meeting as meriting priority attention in the ESA region. The innovation's rationale is the fact that the explosive growth in highly specialized knowledge means that no single institution will have the staff or facilities necessary to cover the breadth and depth of an entire discipline at the graduate level. The SFSE addresses the problem of shortage of qualified subject specialists and inadequate training materials in the region through pooling these scarce resources. Course instructors at the shared facility are internationally recognized subject specialists from within and outside the region. The SFSE also benefits from networks established with other organizations including the World Bank Institute (WBI) which provides training materials related to food and agricultural international trade, as well as sending specialists to give seminars at the facility; the Centre for Environmental Economics and Policy in Africa (CEEPA), whose lecturers teach Environment Management elective courses, among others.

- Curriculum review: This activity is carried out periodically to incorporate advances made in the various course units to ensure the program maintains quality training that meets international standards. This activity is carried out in each academic year.
- Instructors' and retooling workshops: The program also recognizes the need for refresher workshops for core course instructors to keep them abreast with the advances made in their fields. The program therefore organizes retooling and instructors' workshops where internationally renowned subject specialists are invited to facilitate. These workshops also present the lecturers with a unique opportunity to share methods of course delivery and therefore improve on program quality.
- MSc. Scholarships- non nationals: The CMAAE program is based on a strategy designed to enable the stronger agricultural economics departments in the region to help in improving the capacity of the weaker ones. Its key objective as stated is to build capacity in agricultural economics training in the region. The program therefore provides scholarships to students from countries with no accredited departments to study in the accredited departments.
- Gearing up grants: These are one off grants to the accredited departments for investment in essential facilities and equipment. These include connectivity, computers, reference materials, and other training facilities. This is meant to enhance access to current teaching and reference materials to both students and course instructors.

### **How content and courses offered relate to the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) centers mandates and mission**

The CMAAE program's mission is to train graduates to acquire a solid foundation in economic concepts and methods for applied analysis in the public, civil society and private sectors and also offer opportunity for advanced academic pursuits. In order to accomplish this, the program offers a variety of courses geared towards building the capacity of students to act as effective change agents in the fight against food insecurity and poverty in the region in an environmentally sustainable fashion<sup>1</sup>. In this pursuit, the CMAAE program's vision and the CGIAR centers' mandate and mission, which as stated is "food security and poverty

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<sup>1</sup> The CMAAE program's mission is "improved food security and sustainable environment management through capacity building in agricultural economics and related disciplines to enable effective policy analysis, research, formulation and implementation in Eastern, Central and Southern Africa region".

eradication in developing countries through research, partnerships, capacity building, and policy support, promoting sustainable agricultural development based on the environmentally sound management of natural resources”, are related.

The program of study comprises five semesters over 20 to 24 months, which is broken down as follows:

**Semesters 1 & 2:** Focus on core courses comprising Macroeconomics, Microeconomics, Production Economics, Econometrics, Mathematics, Statistics, Research Methodology and Issues in Agricultural and Applied Economics at the mother universities;

**Semester 3:** Students undertake fields of specialized study at the shared facility. Students either specialize in Agriculture and Rural Development; Agricultural Policy and Trade; Agribusiness Management; and Environment and Natural Resource Management by taking a foundation course and related electives. In addition, a compulsory course in Institutional and Behavioural Economics is taught. The list of possible elective courses, set out below, is tentative. Ultimately what is offered at the shared facility is dictated by demand. An illustrative list of courses is set out below.

Agribusiness Supply Chain Management; Agricultural Marketing and Price Analysis; Consumer and Demand Analysis; Environmental Evaluation and Policy; Factor Market Analysis; Farm Management and Production; Farming Systems Analysis; Finance and Risk Management; Food Policy Analysis; Gender and Economic Development; Micro finance; Natural Resource Economics and Management; Project Planning and Management; Quantitative Analysis in Agricultural Economics; Quantitative Analysis of Development Policy; Quantitative Methods in Agribusiness Management; Quantitative Methods in Environmental Economics; Social Organization in Agriculture; and Technological Innovation and Technology Transfer

**Semesters 4 & 5:** Students complete a thesis mentored by subject specialists from his/her home university and where desirable, other collaborating universities within the region. Successful candidates are awarded the MSc degree by their home university.

### **How the Global Open Food and Agriculture University (GO-FAU) Program could contribute to content Development and Capacity Strengthening in the CMAAE Institutions**

The GO-FAU is a distance education initiative of the CGIAR and partner universities with an aim of strengthening postgraduate programs in agriculture by providing high-quality course materials, faculty training, and thesis facilitation. Special focus is given to the developing countries. GO-FAU program has developed a CD-ROM which contains course curriculum, contents and materials for master-level education in agricultural economics. Faculties or departments of agricultural economics can adopt a whole course outline, use a topic from a course outline to include in their existing course, and/or use a number of reading or lecture materials suggested on the CD-ROM. The CMAAE program has collaborated and still collaborates with the GO-FAU program in a number of areas. The CMAAE Program Director helped in the review of the GO-FAU program curriculum. The Heads of Department of the CMAAE collaborating departments were asked to request for the CDs. Between 5-14 CDs were distributed according to the numbers requested by the network members<sup>2</sup>. The feedback received from the network members has been positive, with indications that they are adding value to the materials we have.

Delivery of the CMAAE program courses is currently face to face due to a number of reasons, the main one being connectivity problems. The program management however recognizes the benefits which could be realized if the program is implemented online (especially the Shared Facility for Specialization and Electives (SFSE) which requires considerable/ huge amount of resources to execute). This approach will only be

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<sup>2</sup>The CDs were distributed to departments of Agricultural Economics in the Universities of: Alemaya, Botswana, Eduardo Mondlane, Makerere, Nairobi, Pretoria, Stellenbosch, Swaziland; and Zambia.

possible if connectivity is improved (internet, broad band width, among others) in the participating departments.

This will also need to be complemented with repeated workshops on a number of areas, including:

- Writing skills
- Facilitation skills, and other soft skills

Since GO-FAU program and the CMAAE share similar goals, the two programs can greatly benefit by further enhancing collaboration. The CMAAE could greatly benefit by enriching its curriculum with the developed GO-FAU program curriculum, while the CGIAR centers will gain through improved dissemination of their research findings. The CGIAR centers could therefore assist in improving connectivity in the CMAAE network members to enhance information flow, which currently is a major constraint in operationalizing online learning in the network.

#### **Other related initiatives that CMAAE is involved in**

The CMAAE program is also currently networking with a number of organizations in Africa and other continents. In Africa, the program collaborates with the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA), which is an umbrella organization bringing together and forming coalitions of major stakeholders in agricultural research and development in Africa. FARA complements the innovative activities of national, international and sub-regional research institutions to deliver more responsive and effective services to its stakeholders. The program also networks with other research and capacity building initiatives in the region including the Eastern and Central Africa Program for Agricultural Policy Analysis (ECAPAPA): the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity building in Agriculture (RUFORUM), among others.

Internationally, the program also networks with a number of institutions including partnership to cut hunger in Africa, the CGIAR centers, among others.