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“Competition for Resources in a Changing World:
New Drive for Rural Development”

Development of Agricultural Open Educational Resources through the Use of Wikieducator

RAINER ZACHMANN¹, KRISHNA ALLURI², NICHOLAS KIMOLO³

¹*Consultant International Agricultural Research, Training, Communication, Germany*

²*The Commonwealth of Learning (COL), Canada*

³*Futuristic, Kenya*

Abstract

A challenge for agricultural education, research and development is the availability of technical and scientific information. Open Educational Resources (OER) - similar to Free/Libre Open-Source Software (FLOSS) - are becoming increasingly attractive and important as an alternative to professional textbooks and journals, especially in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) is adapting agricultural open educational resources (AOER) to expand agricultural education for improved livelihoods in SSA. COL created the WikiEducator (www.wikieducator.org) for collaborative:

- planning education projects linked with the development of free content,
- developing free content for e-learning,
- building open educational resources.

A “Wiki” is a website which anyone can use for publishing and editing online. COL’s WikiEducator uses the same free soft-ware that is used for Wikipedia. One can edit and modify content from anywhere in the world. Therefore WikiEducator is an excellent tool for international collaboration on free content development, such as AOER.

In June 2007, in collaboration with and at the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF), Nairobi, Kenya, COL conducted a workshop on AOER. The workshop was build around a toolkit (www.wikieducator.org_workshop_toolkit) and included 23 collaborators from 10 countries, mainly from agricultural universities. Workshop goals were to:

- let participants have hands-on experience in using the WikiEducator and practice developing content,
- try out an online version of the training toolkit for fine-tuning and pilot testing.

Complementary subjects included e-learning, instructional design, learning objects, on-line learning resources, and copyright licensing options, specifically <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa>. Most workshop participants were not used to the development of educational content in an open manner. Some common fears addressed during the workshop were related to:

- loss of intellectual property rights,
- security of published content and risk of vandalism,

- lack of motivation and incentives for producing OER materials.

Experiences with Wiki platforms show that these fears are not substantial.

This was the first COL-initiated workshop on agricultural education and Wiki-Educator in Africa. We expect that AOER and Wiki-Educator will be taken up by national, African (e.g. Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa - FARA) and international institutions (e.g. Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research - CGIAR).

Keywords: Commonwealth of Learning, e-learning, ODL, open educational resources