Tech-MODE for Agricultural Education in sub-Saharan Africa

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Abstract. Technology-mediated open and distance education (Tech-MODE) for agricultural education and improved livelihoods is expanding in sub-Saharan Africa through diverse initiatives. Capabilities have not been formally assessed. Therefore the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) conducted country case studies to identify opportunities for a complementary and catalytic role. Conclusions show that interest and potential for collaboration do exist. See also www.wikieducator.org/Tech-MODE_Synthesis.

Investigating farmers' needs

Tech-MODE for agricultural education and improved livelihoods. Globalization, market liberalization and worldwide food situation threaten food security of the developing countries. Millions of small-scale farmers need access to information, lifelong learning and new skills. Technology-mediated open and distance education (Tech-MODE) - a combination of open and distance learning (ODL) with information and communication technologies (ICT) - has potential to satisfy the increasing demand for education and training.

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) intends to expand the scope for Tech-MODE in agricultural education and improved livelihoods in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). COL's initiatives on agricultural education and improved livelihoods look promising. Similar initiatives are in progress by other stakeholders.

Objective. To enhance collaboration and synergy among stakeholders, COL wishes to identify opportunities for a complementary and catalytic role - preferably in coordination with the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA) - on the following levels:

- Formal degree and post-graduate education
- Continuing professional education
- Lifelong learning for farming communities
- Agricultural education at primary and secondary schools

Country case studies. For the identification of its role, in 2007, COL undertook country case studies with the aim of documenting an inventory of local institutions, facilities and capabilities for Tech-MODE. The study included eight Commonwealth countries from West, Central, East and Southern Africa: Nigeria, Ghana and Sierra Leone; Cameroon; Kenya and Uganda; Tanzania and Zambia; respectively.

Information collected included:

- Country status of agriculture, horticulture and livelihood
- National ICT policies and strategies for agricultural production, research, extension and education
- Institutions, facilities, capabilities, government support and potential available to implement Tech-MODE in collaboration with COL
- Recommendations and suggestions to COL

In connection with a training workshop on open agricultural educational resources and COL's WikiEducator, the case studies have been discussed for further action during the FARA General Assembly in June 2007.

Conclusions and recommendations

- Agriculture is the engine of development. It contributes from 17% (Nigeria) to 49% (Sierra Leone) to GDP. Labor force extends from 60% (Ghana) to 85% (Zambia).
- National ICT policies either exist or are in process. They may include education in general, but rarely reach agriculture specifically. Agricultural education often includes all the levels indicated above. ODL is well recognized, but rarely with emphasis on agriculture.
- Collaborators for Tech-MODE are available mainly on formal educational levels. A few international partnerships are in progress.
- Recommendations for consideration by COL and partner organizations fall into five categories: policy, infrastructure, socio-economy, capacity building, and collaboration. COL may assist in identifying learning needs and opportunities, supporting policy issues, establishing linkages and partnerships, facilitating specification and execution of action plans, including development of infrastructure, capacity building, training, development of materials, monitoring, and following up.

Workshop participants design ODL materials