



The Jinja Consensus on the Need for Change in University-level Agricultural Education in Africa

Jinja, Uganda, May 2002

Educators and rural development experts from different parts of Sub-Saharan Africa met with colleagues from Asia, Latin America, North America and Europe at a seminar held on May 13-17, 2002 in Jinja, Uganda in collaboration with Makerere University, Uganda; EARTH University, Costa Rica; the Salzburg Seminar, USA and Austria; and the Agricultural University of Norway (Noragric). This seminar was the third international seminar on '*Sustainability, Education and the Management of Change in the Tropics*', funded by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) and the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. Two preparatory African workshops were held in Dakar and Kampala. (Details available on project website: www.changetropics.com)

A starting point for the discussions was a broad consensus on the urgent need for change in the tertiary education systems for agriculture and natural resource management in Africa. The vision for such a transformation process is to enhance the capacity of universities to respond to society's changing needs, making agriculture more economically competitive, socially responsible, and environmentally sustainable in an increasingly globalized world economy, and able to provide effective contributions to food security and poverty reduction strategies.

The seminar took note of several recent initiatives to improve agricultural education and learning systems. This includes the Third Millennium Declaration of the Association of African Universities at their Nairobi meeting in February 2001, which states, among other things, that African universities must to a greater degree than ever before, renew their commitment to helping Africa find effective solutions to its perennial problems of poverty, hunger and disease. They must, by their research and teaching, strengthen their contribution to improvements in food production and distribution, and they must strengthen their linkages with the productive sector, both private and public, in agriculture and other sectors, in order to increase the relevance of their work for the benefit of society and the economy. Also considered by the seminar was the strategic emphasis given to both agriculture and education in the overarching regional strategy of NEPAD (the New Partnership for African Development).

The key principles in the Jinja Consensus include the following:

* A focus on developing students with high ethical values with a vocational interest and commitment to rural activities and in producing graduates who are capable of independently accessing and using knowledge.

* Agricultural programs must provide students with a market orientation. A key curriculum objective is for students to develop leadership, entrepreneurial and management skills which also embrace social and environmental responsibility. Graduates should be able to generate activities which can become important sources of income growth and employment in rural areas.

* Such changes will require stronger emphasis on new or revised student selection criteria and admission policies to ensure that agricultural faculties and universities prioritize students interested in careers related to African agriculture and rural development. Special emphasis needs to be given to lower income rural applicants, particularly women.

* A student-centered approach to learning and discovery will include flexible and practical approaches to problem-solving, effective communication skills and strong linkages to rural communities and the developmental needs of key stakeholders such as women farmers. Through experiential learning methods, universities should focus on facilitating student development rather than transferring knowledge. New student evaluation systems will be necessary to reflect these goals.

* Networking among all stakeholders, including educational institutions, governments, NGOs, civil society, and the rural sector, is important to create synergies and develop an integrated, cross-disciplinary approach to curriculum development.

* Such profound institutional changes will benefit from periodic internal and external institutional evaluations, as proposed in the Nairobi Declaration of the African Universities.

The seminar participants noted many examples of innovative changes already taking place in tertiary agricultural education systems in Africa and consider it important that these must be accelerated and reinforced.

In this spirit the Jinja Consensus concluded that a two-pronged approach is needed for Africa:

- first, there is an urgent need to transform existing institutions and to strengthen the development-focused processes of change taking place. This will be further strengthened by developing an Africa-wide network which reinforces the paradigm changes highlighted above.

- and, second, to reinforce and accelerate this process by establishing a new regional institution which can provide impetus to developing new innovative learning methods in student-centered learning and effective cross-institutional sharing of lessons. It should be established as a privately endowed, non-profit Pan-African agricultural university which can combine student and faculty education emphasizing close linkages to other African universities, including faculty visitations and exchanges.

The participants at the Jinja Seminar agreed that action along these lines is urgently needed and will make significant contributions to Africa's sustainable development goals.