

OMUSATI PROJECT

Coordinator: North Karelia University of Applied Sciences, Finland

Partners: Mikkeli University of Applied Sciences, Finland; Ogongo Agricultural College, Namibia; Botswana College of Agriculture, Botswana

Study areas: Agricultural Sciences



Network meeting in Namibia. Photo from the archives of Katriina Korhonen.

What are the main aims of your network?

The main aim of the network is to deepen and strengthen the cooperation in Agriculture and Forestry education. Focus will be on providing perspectives to sustainable development and agro-environmental aspects in the partner countries.

Curriculum development, different teaching methods and the comparability of the study programmes for exchange students will be promoted. The network strives to continue offering the students and teachers at both ends possibilities to do benchmarking, widen up their professional background and focus beyond their own continent. Professional development and intercultural learning are a natural outcome of the cooperation.

What kind of activities are there in your network?

Personal contacts through other programmes are behind the cooperation with the Namibian partner. Also the expertise that Ogongo Agricultural College offered to the Oniipa environmental project, implemented by the North Karelia Development Association, encouraged to continue the collaboration between North Karelia University of Applied Sciences and the



college. North–South programme provided welcome resources to continue and develop the cooperation in 2005. Cooperation began in the field of Forestry and was later extended to Agriculture. Botswana College of Agriculture joined the project in the second phase to provide different perspective on agricultural training in southern Africa.

Exchanges have been the main form of activities. The ideal length of a teacher exchange in Omu-sati project is considered to be 3–4 weeks which is enough to acquaint oneself with the system at the partner institution, meet the objectives and still be financially feasible. Student exchanges have lasted one semester (5 months) in Forestry and 3 months in Agriculture.

A network meeting was arranged in February 2008 in northern Namibia to improve and evaluate the activities of the network and to introduce and welcome the new partner, Botswana College of Agriculture, to the network. An important part of the meeting was to plan the theme, contents and implementation of a joint intensive course which is scheduled for August 2009 in northern Botswana.

What sort of successes and challenges have you encountered during your project?

Through the project Finnish and African students and teachers have got tools to improve their work, skills, knowledge, attitudes and future career. Intercultural learning has been greatly promoted by the project, and persons with little earlier international experience have been involved in the exchanges. Within the teacher exchanges there has been an interest to see and explore the curriculum and teaching methods used at both ends, and later on also to develop some joint teaching materials and methods.

African teachers and students have got information and have seen practical examples of a sustainable use of forest resources in Finland. They have also visited various forestry organisations and forest industries that do not exist in their own country, acquiring new ideas on forestry extension, forest ownership and wood utilisation.

Most teacher and student exchanges have been successes – the individuals have developed professionally, gained new perspectives to their studies and teaching, and learned and experienced life in another culture. The network meeting and working together for the Manual of Good Practices contributed to the common goals. It was also a successful and intensive start for South–South cooperation.

The biggest challenges have related to immigration processes and acquiring the required permits, especially for students who stay more than 3 months. We have found out that students should have been selected earlier to avoid the rush in taking care of practical matters. In addition, communication has occasionally been challenging due to sometimes unreliable connections and partly cultural reasons. Credit transfer for African students is not easy since the curricula are fixed and the category of optional studies is not available in all the partner institutions.

Your advice to forthcoming networks

Get to know your partners personally.

Define contact persons for the project at all partner institutions and agree on the responsibilities, contribution and support services of each partner institution.

Select the exchange students and teachers on time and orientate them properly.

Reserve enough time to apply the required permits.

Be patient and enjoy big and small successes.

Respect the different cultures, both in working environment and everyday life.

