



Brief History

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The department of LARMAT has a unique heritage because it was established in 2005 following the merger of two previously full-fledged departments and an Institute. The departments were Soil Science, Range Management and the Institute for Dryland Research Development and Utilization. It is the second largest and dynamic department of the Faculty of Agriculture in the College of Agriculture and Veterinary Sciences.

The department of Soil Science was among the oldest units of the Faculty of Agriculture teaching all soil science and related courses in the faculty. In 1976, the department launched a Master's degree programme in Soil Science and thereafter a Doctoral programme. Several of the Masters graduates proceeded to Ph.D. One of these, Caleb Othieno is now Professor of Soil Science at Moi University. From the start of the department to 2005, several academic members of staff served as Chairs persons. These included: Prof. Fewster (1970), the late Peter Ahn (1972-1977), [Professor Shellemiah O. Keya \(1976-1984\)](#), [Professor Joseph Keter \(1985-1992\)](#), [Professor Joseph Mbuvi \(1992-1995\)](#), [Professor Nancy Karanja \(1996-2002\)](#) and [Professor CKK Gachene \(2002-2008\)](#). Microbiological Resources Center for East and Southern Africa supported by UNESCO/FAO/UNEP was launched in 1976. The Center hosted regional training, research and international collaboration in soil bio-prospecting, conservation/preservation and utilization of soil microbial resource in Africa and beyond. In 1980 the BIOFIX legume inoculant was developed and piloted in Kenya and East Afri

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In 1991 improvement of Rhizobia technology for soil fertility improvement in East Africa won first Ceiber Geigy African Academy of Science Gold Medal Prize. This product is now under commercial production and marketing through UoN/MEA Limited public/private partnership, the first one of its kind in the University of Nairobi. And in 1984, the department launched the African Association for Biological Nitrogen Fixation (AABNF) that has continued to meet in various African Capitals and attracted substantial funding for research such N₂-Africa project funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The University of Nairobi, MIRCEN and partners hosted the AABNF Conference in 2000 and 2012 in Nairobi.

The Department of Range Management was started in 1979 at the behest of the government to train graduate-level manpower to manage its vast drylands. The first intake of six students comprising diploma graduates from Egerton College (now Egerton University) was enrolled the same year with full government support. The Government supported the establishment of the physical and field teaching facilities at Kibwezi and the training of academic staff in the USA at both Masters and Doctoral level. In 1988, a Master's program was launched and the first group of students was admitted in 1989. From 1993--2003, the Department in partnership with SAREC/SIDA hosted a project entitled Pastoral Information Network (PINEP) to train Masters Cadre staff for the IGAD member countries. Through the said programme, two other students (Drs. [Moses Nyangito](#) and [Oliver Wasonga](#)) were supported upto PhD level and are now senior staff members in the department.

Since its establishment in 2005, the department has grown in all dimensions—staff, academic, research and outreach programmes. The department currently has 2 full Professors, 6 Associate Professors, 5 senior lecturers, 5 Lecturers, 3 Tutorial Fellows, 1 Principal Technologist, 1 Chief Technologist and 10 technologists at various levels. The department currently offers 2 undergraduate, 6 masters and 7 doctoral programmers. One of the PhD programme, that is, PhD in Dryland Resource Management is so far the only science - based PhD programme at the University of Nairobi that offers course work and research. Since its inception in 2008, it has attracted more than 45 PhD students.

The Alumni of the Department through the Postgraduate programmes or staff are found in Key



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Agricultural and related sectors in Kenya, Africa and beyond: Among them are [Prof. Benson Mochoge](#), former Director IGAD, [Mr. John M.N. Mututho](#), the former Member of Parliament for Naivasha Constituency, Professor Nancy Karanja, coordinator CIP_URBAN HARVEST, Shellemiah O. Keya, former V.C. Moi University, retired UN-FAO staff, former Deputy Director General, WARDA, and now Chancellor, Dedan Kimathi University of Science and Technology; and Prof F. Lenga, Commissioner, CHE.

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