

## **UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI STUDENTS ATTEND AND SHINE IN THE 2016 INTERNATIONAL TRAINING COURSE ON ORGANIC AGRICULTURE HELD AT MAKERERE UNIVERSITY, UGANDA**

### **Participant's Snapshot of the International Training Course on Organic Agriculture**

The International Training Course on Organic Agriculture (ITCOA) started in July 2009 as a direct response to the expressed demands for training and field exposure of university under-graduate students, in their third year, on organic agriculture trends and perspectives. This was in addition to the rising concern of the health and sustainability of agroecosystems. The ITCOA aims at offering intensive training to participants beyond the normal class room conventions. The ITCOA fosters an intercultural and interdisciplinary learning environment by bringing together students and trainers from diverse backgrounds from Eastern Africa and Europe. This year; students from Makerere University (Uganda), Sokoine University of Agriculture (Tanzania), University of Nairobi (Kenya) and Bahir Dar University (Ethiopia) participated in the training. The ITCOA is held annually, in the month of July at Makerere University. Since 2009 to date, about 50 students from the University of Nairobi - in their third year - have participated in the ITCOA, courtesy of the very generous efforts and support of Dr. Onwonga. The ITCOA, for the UoN students, also doubles up as part of their field attachment, programme.



**The Dean, FoA, Prof. Kimenju with part of the students (from Left: Gathima Maryjoan, Karani Alex, Atamba Emmanuel, Mureithi Rachael Wangare, Dean, Ngode Elly, Okinyi Anulisa Claire, Wamalu Angeline, Oduor Valarie Awino and Maina Stephen) before leaving for Kampala to participate in the ITCOA**

The training involved an intensive and informative three weeks of e-learning, whereby students exchanged information online through [itcoa.wordpress.com](http://itcoa.wordpress.com) blog. After the online training session, the participating students from all the four countries met at Makerere University, Kampala Uganda, on 10<sup>th</sup> July 2016 to proceed with other training sessions. We had an introductory phase where the participants had the opportunity to interact and know each other and to also be taken through the purpose of training course and what is expected of each student.

This year's theme was exploring the limits of innovation by equipping the students with skills and knowledge towards contribution to a more sustainable and inclusive agricultural system in East

Africa and application of ecological methods that sustainably improve livelihoods while conserving the environment.



(Left Fredrick Njoga; Forefront - Maina Stephen



Maryjoan Gathima and Racheal Wangare demonstrating how to prepare Kenyan Food

Students from UoN performing during the cultural evening

On the same week, the students left for Rural Community in Development (RUCID) Training College for Organic Farming in Mityana, Uganda. The students were taken through both practical field sessions and some lectures on Organic Farming at the College.



ITCOA 2016 participants at RUCID Centre



ITCOA 2016 participants at Value addition plant at RUCID



ITCOA 2016 participants being trained at RUCID

They were also free to discuss various issues and topics concerning Organic Agriculture at the College which had a vast farm on Organic farming practices and processing plant for value addition where the students learnt practically how to make fruit juices and dry fruits. After an intensive experience at RUCID training college the students headed back to Kampala for the second phase of the training course. The students were then taken through phase 2 of the training where they were inducted on the current state of Organic farming in East Africa by experts from Nogamu, and Ugocert which are the leading Organic Certification bodies in Uganda. The students were then introduced to the Enabling Rural innovations (ERI) approach by expert practitioners. The five main pillars of the approach namely: Farmer Participatory Research, Farmer Participatory Diagnosis, Participatory Market Research, Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation and Enterprise Development were clearly explained to the participants by the experts. After the introduction to the ERI approach, the students were supposed to carry out research on Agro-ecosystem Health and ERI Approach impact on farmers in Rakai District. The students were therefore, in preparation for the same, taken through tool making process where they picked various indicators and scales to use in their research



Dr. Onwonga giving a lecture on innovations towards Agroecological health in tropical organic farms to ITCOA 2016 participants

The third phase of the training was Implementation. In this phase, the students were required to conduct research in Rakai District on Agroecosystem Health (AESH) and ERI approach. This was done well with the remarkable assistance of Extension experts from CaritasMaddo, an NGO that has been working with farmers in the area. During the fieldwork, the participants were expected to carry out research through interviews with farmers and analyzing the various aspects of AESH and to also carry out soil tests for the farmers visited. After the extensive field activities the students were able to analyze the data obtained and they presented the same in a farmer workshop with all the farmers visited and other invited farmers. They then regrouped and met different farmers that they visited and talked to them about their specific findings and recommendations. After the workshop, the students were taken for a retreat at Lake Mboru national park for 2 days before travelling back to Kampala for the public workshop. The next two days, the students prepared their

scientific posters for presentation on the public workshop which was held on 29<sup>th</sup> July at Makerere University, Kampala. The students were able to impressively present to the donors representatives and members of the public their findings on the research they conducted. This marked the end of the training course, and the program ended with a ceremony where all the participants were issued certificates for successfully going through the training course.

We are grateful to the organizing team in Kampala Mr. Hudson logistics Manager, and Mrs. Daphine, Mr. Templer Noel for steering the e-learning process, our Country Coordinator prof. Richard Onwonga for believing in us as an able team to represent the institution, The VC for granting us permission to travel to Kampala, The CAVS and particularly Faculty of Agriculture administration through the Dean for the overwhelming support, our session lectures for being understanding and supportive as to let us go, our donors (biovision and horizont 3000), the participants, whom without this wouldn't have been possible and above all God Almighty