

CSA Campus Forums

Equipping, Engaging and Empowering Students Taking Agricultural Courses in Kenyan Universities

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Executive Summary

1.1 Background

Agriculture is and will still be an important sector of the Kenyan economy. The Kenya's National Development Blue print "Vision 2030" envisions tremendous growth of the economy with an annual growth rate of at least 10% per year leading to the year 2030. However, for this to be achieved, the agriculture sector cannot be ignored as it directly contributes to 21.9% of GDP, and is a major employer to at least 56% of the total labour force. Its importance is further reinforced on the account that it is identified as a key pillar of government focus to spur and sustain inclusive economic development in the country. Christened the 'Big four', the agricultural sector directly links to the achieving of Food and Nutrition security as well as being a strategic support sector to industrialization and manufacturing by providing raw materials. In addition, the active role played by agriculture sector cannot be understated amidst the ever increasing human population and urbanization.

As a result of its importance, the sector presents an opportunity for the creation of employment to the many youth entering the job market every year. However, the current statistics on youth unemployment paint a grim picture, with dramatic thousands of application whenever a job vacancy is advertised. This depicts a scenario of increasing job seekers rather than job creators. Currently, out of the 10-12 million young people in the continent seeking to enter the continent's workforce, only 3.1 million of them could get gainful employment. This worrying trend needs appropriate strategies in place to create jobs and skilful workforce who can create jobs and feed the increasing population in a sustainable manner. It is therefore increasingly important to match these young people to the agricultural sector to unlock new opportunities for gainful employment and avoid the ripple effects of runaway unemployment such as social unrest, unsafe migration as well as crime and insecurity. In return, the sector could benefit from a dynamic workforce that is innovative; has a high uptake of technological expertise and has the ability to take on significant levels of risk to transform the sector and to attain agricultural transformation.

 *It is the small trees that hold the future of the forest ~ Anonymous* 

The future food security in Kenya is at stake!

Despite the increasing globalisation, urbanization and tremendous population explosion in African nations, there is great need to match these challenges with safe food that is produced in a sustainable way that considers the environmental integrity. This demands great innovations and dedicated well trained workforce that can revolutionise the agricultural sector. Sadly, the present state and trends is wanting for this. For example, the present youth and students who are primed to become the next generation of agricultural professionals are decreasing with every University intake. The 2018 Economic Survey by the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics denotes that the degree enrolment of agricultural courses decreased from 24,221 students in 2017 to 18,165 in 2018.

The decreasing numbers of youth enrolling in agricultural courses and the few who are involved in farming as an occupation is a national signal of distress in the agricultural sector. The situation is exacerbated by the perception held by many youth that agriculture is a career of last resort, one of drudgery, one with low monetary benefits and a preserve of the old. It is no wonder the average age of a farmer in Kenya is 60 years.

Some of the gaps identified in the students and graduates in the sector include low motivation, lack of requisite skills and knowledge on current agricultural trends, policy changes, modern technologies and innovations as well as low understanding of the opportunities at their disposal that could aid them to eke out a living after graduation. They also lack the exposure on modern methods of farming as well as the techniques to start and sustain profitable and sustainable agricultural enterprises.



What can we do to reverse the trends?

This initiative seeks to revitalise youth in agriculture by bridging the identified knowledge/skills gap and provide a platform for mentorship by agricultural professionals to increase the youth opportunities and experience. It is anticipated that this will be effective in changing the negative mind-set that students and graduates harbour about agriculture as a profession.

The initiative will also to build the students' capacity on modern agribusiness techniques and on climate smart agriculture. Through this, it will facilitate and connect the students/new graduates with young successful agripreneurs and agribusiness specialists for mentorship and experience training on the prospects and opportunities of venturing into farming and agricultural entrepreneurship.

Lastly, the initiative will endeavour to link students with internships and job opportunities in agricultural related organizations to help integrate their classroom knowledge and theory with practical application in a professional or community setting for problem solving and inventions in the sector.

1.2. Project Model and objectives

 *A society that invests in its youth invests in its future ~ Anonymous* 

The project goal

To empower university/campus students by equipping them with agribusiness skills, exposing them to the professional setup through internships and job opportunities and building their capacity on climate smart agriculture. The aim is to engage youth as active players in food and nutrition security consequently transforming agriculture through innovation and technology application.

Main program objective:

To develop a network of youth particularly students in campus/university who are motivated, well adapted to modern agribusiness and equipped with the requisite knowledge, skills and attitudes to contribute towards agricultural transformation.

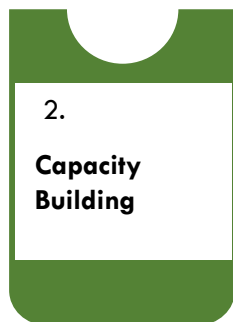
Specific objective(s)

- To motivate students to change their perception about undertaking a career in agriculture by showcasing agriculture professionals and young successful farmers who can offer peer to peer learning and mentorship to the students.
- To build student capacity in modern agribusiness skills and climate smart agriculture concepts to enable them harness the massive opportunities in agribusiness.
- To link students to agricultural related employment opportunities while exposing them to internships and job placements for skills development.
- To create a platform for innovation and technology development among students and recent graduates in solving agricultural problems along the value chain for different enterprises

1.3 Approach



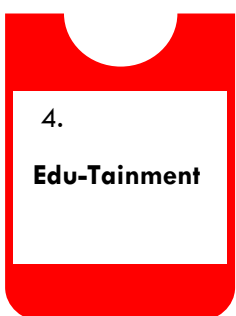
Agricultural talks (Ag-talks) - Will provide a platform for agriculture professionals, and agri-preneurs to share their experiences and professional journeys in the agricultural landscape. It will also provide an opportunity for HR professionals working in agricultural institutions to inform and guide the students on what their organizations look for when hiring. The ag-talks will eventually build up into an Agriculture career fair.



Ag-trainings - Through this component, the initiative will build the capacity of the students on key agricultural themes, trends and competencies. It will bridge their knowledge gap on concepts including sustainable development goals, agricultural insurance, climate smart agriculture, nutrition, modern agribusiness techniques, digital agriculture, big data as well as design thinking and ag-innovation. Short certificate and graduates refresher courses will be developed and offered at UoN to provide this opportunity.



Ag-Mentorship - Based on the selected career path, each student will get a mentor who will offer professional advice on academic and career advancement. This component will also encompass creating linkages with the agriculture industry to help the students acquire internships, attachments, jobs or transition into farming and agribusiness as a career. This will start right for course selections in high schools and during enrolment at institutions of higher learning.



Ag-tainment - All work with no play makes Jack a dull boy. Since the concepts described above are somewhat complex and require maximum concentration, the initiative will introduce edutainment sessions that include agriculture themed photo contests, debates, painting competitions, Ag-exhibitions as well as movies and games to make the sessions more effective and highly interactive. This is also meant to demystify the notion that agriculture is a boring & no-fun sector.



Ag-Clubs – To enhance the sustainability of the model and to ensure constant engagement and interaction between the students, the initiative will help form CSA campus clubs that are student run. This platform will form a string network of youth in agriculture for information exchange, business networks and investment opportunities.