

Travel Report from a Regional Workshop

"Developing Africa through Science, Technology and Innovations in Agriculture - Women as the key drivers"

28. September - 2. October 2009, Entebbe, Uganda

Did you know that agriculture in Africa is a highly feminised occupation with more than 70% of workers in the area being women - and elderly women, too? Furthermore, did you know that feminist research from the 1970ties and the 1980ties documents that feminisation of an occupation most often leads to low status, low pay, simple technology and low security? The question arises: "What does this mean for the sustainable future of African agriculture?"

This question was one of the most important questions discussed in the regional workshop "Developing Africa through Science, Technology and Innovations in Agriculture - Women as the key drivers" organised by the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM, <http://ruforum.org/>), in collaboration with the International Foundation for Science (IFS, <http://www.ifs.se/>) and the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA, <http://www.cta.int/>).

Workshop participants, many of them former or present IFS-grantees, came from 25 countries, mainly from Africa and much to my surprise there was a fair gender balance. My participation in the workshop was funded by DDRN and the invitation was presumably caused by my longstanding membership and former Chair-holding position in the international association Gender And Science And Technology (GASAT).

The main themes discussed in the workshop were the following:

- Emerging challenges to development
- Science, technology and innovations (ST&I) for sustainable development and management of biological and water resources
- Gender issues in ST&I
- Capacity development for ST&I: Institutional networking and collaborating opportunities
- ST&I: Policy options

At the end of the workshop a new African IFS hub was officially launched, to be hosted by RUFORUM in Uganda. Unfortunately, I had to leave on September 30, thus this report only covers the first three days' events.

The key note address to the first theme was given by Ralph von Kaufmann, Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa, who was the one to make the above statement about feminisation. He not only stated many challenges but also pointed to possible solutions, such as: Transformation of agricultural education and training with an emphasis on learning, incl. peer learning and life long learning; focus on problem solving and contextually appropriate information; involvement of all stakeholders and partners. From a Danish perspective it was interesting that he mentioned the Danish Africa Commission's report as an example of a good approach to agricultural and agrobusiness development.

The presentation which impressed me the most under theme 2 was titled: "The agricultural innovation systems approach for sustainable development: Field experience from Tanzania" presented by a young Tanzanian woman, Vera Mugittu, director of Muvek Development Solutions Ltd., Tanzania (<http://www.muvek.co.tz/index.html>), a private consultancy company. Vera presented a project called Research into Use (RIU, <http://www.researchintouse.com>), a project funded by DfID where an Innovation Systems Approach is being applied in a dialogue between all stakeholders in order to properly identify and formulate the research questions. Again this is interesting from a Danish perspective - and especially from an AAU (Aalborg University) perspective since the concept of National Systems of Innovation originates from this university

Vera mentioned that her passion was to put research outputs into use in order to restore the important role of the researcher in society. She was very dynamic and made a lot of thoughtful and sometimes radical remarks to other speakers, such as that it is high time African researchers stopped fooling themselves by running after Western researchers in an attempt to do front line research for which African universities have neither the resources nor the capacity - instead they should rather focus upon making good use of all the existing knowledge in the world and use that knowledge for innovation in order to solve some of Africa's many problems. This discussion reminded me of a similar discussion taking place in a conference on East African engineering education in 1975 - what does Africa need most: Practically oriented or theoretically oriented engineering education??

The key note paper under the third theme titled: "Africa's Green Revolution: Gender Perspectives in Science and Technology" was given by my old GASAT colleague from Nigeria, Stella Williams. I first met Stella in the GASAT 3 conference in London in 1985. Since then she has risen in rank and her very lively presentation was at times drawing upon her own life story, a story about how a successful African woman in her fight to reach the top had (to) behave(d) like a man - and maybe become (like) a man? No doubt that Stella has had a hard time and has had to fight many battles - but her success documents that it is possible - and that was her advice to the young women present: Use the weapon of the men and don't step aside for anybody. She has instigated AWARD (African Women in Agricultural Research and Development), a two-year fellowship programme for fast-tracking the career of African women scientists.

My presentation was a lead paper under theme 3, titled "More women - more innovation - more 'development'?". The presentation was based on results from an EU-funded project called Curriculum for Women and Technology (CuWAT) and the Problem Based Learning (PBL) approach to teaching and learning; and it focused on arguing for the following two main messages: 1) Innovation is enhanced by diversity, incl. gender diversity. 2) Higher Education in S&T needs to change - for many reasons, one of them being: to attract more women. In addition PBL was introduced as a proposal for a changed curriculum (see attached ppt-presentation). Not surprisingly, this presentation was received very positively by Vera Mugittu, given that the PBL approach emphasises the contextuality of research and studying and includes the involvement of all stakeholders as an important element in the process.

As a result of my participation in the RUFORUM workshop Vera Mugittu has been invited to participate in a workshop on "The Role of Higher Education in Africa: 'Triple Helix' Responses to Climate Change", to be held at AAU on October 30th, 2009, where invited speakers from Tanzania and Kenya will present together with speakers from South Africa and Denmark and where continued work on a project proposal for collaboration in higher education between universities in

Africa and in Denmark in the area of climate change will take place. The workshop which is being funded by DDRN is open for all interested parties - invitation is attached.

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