

African University – Agricultural  
Curriculum

*[Outline of remarks made by David Williams Russell, Vice Chairman of African University Foundation, at the first International Symposium on the Role of African Higher Education and Sustainable Community Development: The Case for African University, Held December 28-30, 2008, at Tali Town Hall, Tali, Manyu Division, Upper Banyang Subdivision, South West Region, Cameroon.]*

Consider the life cycle of a plant. A seed is planted. It is watered and fed from the soil. It ripens, matures, is harvested and consumed.

What have I left out? From the standpoint of a viable agricultural system, almost everything important – the human element – human knowledge, experience and ingenuity.

It is the accumulated human knowledge of many thousands of years which needs to be rediscovered, relearned and reapplied in every growing season of every generation.

In short, it is the improvement, organization, and development, aged transmittal of human knowledge and experience which makes a modern agricultural system possible.

In other words, modern agriculture is grounded in ground, but it is the developmental and transmittal of human knowledge which makes it viable.

What is unique about the African University approach to a modern agricultural curriculum? This is simple. YOU: It is the people of Tali; the people of Cameroon; the people of Africa; who will make the difference.

What we propose is that African University, in consultation with all of you, and based on studies of the Tali soils, plants, weather, together with the importation of and/or rediscovery of effective agricultural technologies, and most important, the collective experience and knowledge of all of you, will develop a practical agriculture curriculum devoted to enabling students to develop programs for the organized production of

agricultural products which can be produced, distributed, preserved, stored, and sold locally, regionally, and even globally, without vast infusions of capital from outside Africa.

We stress that the African University curriculum will be intensely practical, not theoretical, and will be useable within the African context; rather than constituting the rigid imposition of a foreign technology not suitable for the creation of a self-sustaining African agricultural system.

This reminds me of a story told by my grandfather, who went to India as an agricultural consultant. He watched as a U.S. Department of Agriculture bureaucrat demonstrated the complex workings of a huge John Deere self-propelled diesel plow. After his presentation, the bureaucrat turned to a veteran Indian farmer who had closely observed the demonstration. The U.S. bureaucrat said, seeking to validate his demonstration,

“Now, sir, you’ve seen the demonstration of this plow. Tell us how you plow a deeper furrow.”

“I lean on the handles,” the farmer replied.

The lesson here is that it is not enough for an agricultural curriculum to be state-of-the-art; it must also be practical and useable by the people of the region.

African University’s agricultural curriculum will be devoted to the principles of practicability and usability.

Indeed, the key inputs to the African University curriculum will be the incorporation and adaptation of your local knowledge and experience, supplemented by technologies and concepts which will be adopted by the African University faculty and

students to enable Cameroon to develop a self-sustaining agricultural system. This will result in entrepreneurial new ventures which will be spun off from the University to become new businesses for students and Cameroon residents.

Students will be encouraged throughout their education to develop practical business models for Cameroon agriculture. Emphasis will be not just upon food production, but upon food processing, food preservation and storage, and upon food distribution and sale to middlemen and ultimate consumers. In other words, the African University agricultural curriculum will seek to develop and enhance the entire agricultural supply chain as a self-sustaining mainstay of the Cameroon economy.

We stress that the curriculum will emphasize the development of regional supply chains of businesses which will be self-sustaining within the Cameroon market, while capable of integration with the global marketplace. As this curriculum is developed to incorporate the collective wisdom of African residents, students, businessmen, and of African University faculty and students, including visiting faculty and consultants and exchange students, and joint programs with other institutions around the world, African University will create a uniquely African model for self sufficiency and continual growth and improvement in agriculture for the benefit of all Africans.

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