Processes to Develop an Agricultural Science Curriculum at Messiah Theological Institute at Mbale, Uganda

Thomas Kipkurgat, John Kessell, David Lawver, Matt Baker and Sussie Bullock
Texas Tech University

Introduction  Uganda has substantial natural resources, including fertile soils, regular rainfall and sizeable mineral deposits of copper and cobalt. Agriculture is the most important sector of the economy, employing more than 84% of the total labor force and generates over 42.5% of the gross national product (WRI, 2000). Agriculture is the only business venture people in local areas can participate in to possibly reduce poverty. Agriculture continues to decline everyday, partly from shortage of labor, poor technology use, urbanization, and farm sizes due land use competitions (New Vision, 2005). Agricultural products supply nearly all of Uganda's foreign exchange earnings, with coffee (of which Uganda is Africa's leading produce accounting for about 19% and fish 17% of the country's exports in 2002. Introduction of agricultural curriculum at Messiah Theological Institute (MTI) will provide opportunities for post-secondary graduates and community members to become more knowledgeable about agricultural practices. The findings will provide program planners the benefits to implement the curriculum. The people of Uganda are hungry for help and establishing agricultural science program will enhance their livelihood.

Purpose  This poster presents the process of collecting data for needs assessment for developing agricultural science curriculum. The study was conducted in the Summer of 2005 in Mbale, Uganda. The information was gathered using one-on-one interviews, survey instrument, focus groups, observation and farmer-to-farmer visits. To collect reliable data, information was gathered from local leaders, government officials, local farmers, and faculty members at Messiah Theological Institute. During the focus group workshop, over 95% (N=37) of the respondents attended and shared topics such as important courses that should be in the curriculum, future sustainability of the institute and the long term benefits of the curriculum development.

Conclusion  The information gathered revealed that development of agricultural program was important for both economic and for subsistence production in Uganda. Although agriculture is the main source of income to many, an agricultural curriculum is not established well enough to meet the needs of the future small-scale and large-scale producers. Non-governmental organizations do exist, but well designed agricultural programs are still missing. A majority of the respondents felt that young people consider agriculture a dirty job and the best approach was to change the attitudes of youth by introducing a curriculum that promotes efficient production.

Educational Importance  Introduction of agricultural curriculum at Messiah Theological Institute will assist in teaching youth the importance of and to have respect for agriculture as a profession. The ultimate goal is to create opportunities for youth in the rural areas. Development of agricultural program will ensure that courses will provide knowledge about issues and problems facing farmers such as marketing and use of modern technology. Conducting the needs assessment was critical to promoting and sustaining agricultural production in Uganda.