

REPORT ON THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE COL SUCAPRI E-PLATFORM SELECTION WORKSHOP

5TH - 8TH OF DECEMBER, 2007



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1. INTRODUCTION

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) in conjunction with SUCAPRI organised a three (3) day workshop on the 5th - 8th of December, 2007 to deliberate on the selection of an e-platform for the SUCAPRI project. This workshop was held at the University of Nairobi, College of Agricultural and Veterinary Sciences (CAVS), Nairobi. The objectives of this workshop were:

1. To collectively agree upon the main purposes and functions of an e-platform in two broad areas:
 - Enhancing communications and coordination between the four Kenya University partners and with others
 - Providing a common platform for e-learning programmes/learning materials in IAR4D emerging from the EDULINK/SUCARPI project and other sources.
2. To jointly select an appropriate e-platform after an evaluation of existing platform and agree on the modalities of operation of the e-platform
3. To agree on and plan COL support for any capacity building needs in partner Universities for the smooth operation of the selected e-platform
4. To deliberate on content development modalities and the possible establishment of a technical support center for the content digitalization, animations and illustrations

5. To deliberate on a pilot phase of content development where selected SUCAPRI members will be involved in the development of 10-15 lessons to be hosted within WikiEducator. This training to focus on content development skills in WikiEducator, ATutor and Moodle.

Five of six of the SUCAPRI members were represented in this workshop. They were grouped as follows:

- 2 representatives from the University of Nairobi
- 2 representatives from Kenyatta University
- 1 representative from Kenya Agricultural Research Institute
- 2 representatives from Makerere University, Uganda
- 1 representative from Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT).

2. WORKSHOP PROCEEDINGS

DAY 1 PROCEEDINGS

The workshop started off with introductory remarks from Prof. Moses Tenywa who thanked the Commonwealth of Learning and ICRA for their much useful support and outlined the objectives of the SUCAPRI project which included:

1. The development of staff capacity in Rural Innovation within the various SUCAPRI stakeholder institutions;
2. Achieving multi-stakeholder engagement in the extension, research and private sectors;

3. Curriculum review and reform; and
4. Development of learning materials.

He outlined that SUCAPRI felt the need to address this issues based on a “crisis” facing most of the Universities in the Eastern Africa region of declining funding with increased student numbers. This is coupled with an international funding shift from tertiary to primary education. SUCAPRI is committed to address some of the shortcomings contributing to this state. These specific shortcomings include:

1. Limited content delivery methods with ineffective networking opportunities and formal linkages;
2. Inflexible academic programs due to financial constraints and compartmentalized units; and
3. Failure to cope with new technology both in education and learning principles.

These are the reasons that though agricultural education has been practiced for a long period of time, many farmers still practice traditional farming methods. New approaches that focus on the appreciation of the farmer’s indigenous knowledge have to be developed.

SUCAPRI will address these issues through adopting a strategy of sensitizing senior management officials and re-inventing curriculums and various programs within the SUCAPRI members institutions. More specifically, SUCAPRI will:

1. Develop a multi-disciplinary learning cycle focused on causing institutional reform and staff empowerment;

2. Participate in curriculum review focused on research on how best curriculums can be modified to articulate industry requirements and engage prospective employers; and
3. Develop learning materials focused on reusability and joint content development.

Dr. George Chemini’gwa from the University of Nairobi, elaborated on the workshop objectives and obtained members consensus on the pursuit of the said objectives. This was followed by discussions on the concept of Open Educational Resources (OER’s) moderated by the COL’s Consultant. In this session, OERs were defined (including the critical role they can play in Africa). It was noted that though the concept of sharing was acceptable, issues of inadequate man-power and infrastructure could hinder the sharing of these resources, however, this should not be seen as stumbling blocks as the issues of access are being addressed through various national, regional and international interventions. The need to sensitize the Universities on the concept of OER was also noted.

These discussions were later followed by the identification of the SUCAPRI needs which were identified to constitute both communication and e-Platform requirements. The communication platform would facilitate the transfer and sharing of information related to SUCAPRI activities to both SUCAPRI members and external stakeholders. This communication platform will have the following features:

1. Support for emails and exchange of files (audio, video, text, graphics and documents);
2. Incorporate Voice Over IP (VoIP) support including SMS and Internet telephony;
3. Support discussion forums, chats and internal emails;
4. Support group collaboration and project planning; and

5. Help in the development and implementation of a communication strategy.

On the other hand the e-Platform, which will be used to implement the Learning Management System and a Content Development Platform should support:

1. Collaborative Content Development
2. Should reach a larger number of stakeholders while being able to support rigorous quality assurance before hosting for learners use
3. Learners' activities and address pedagogical issues

The day came to completion with an evaluation of one of the e-Platforms (The WikiEducator) outlining the various content publishing licensing schemes and Wiki's features of collaborative content authoring, communication and interaction through discussions, email integration and talk pages plus WikiEducator pedagogical template design.

DAY 2 PROCEEDINGS

The second day started with the rapportuers reading the previous day proceedings and focused on the demonstration of key features of various learning management systems (Moodle and Atutor) highlighting their key features in course and learning management, learner activities and facilitations. The focus was placed on two content management systems (Joomla and Drupal) to complement the existing mailing list as a communication platform and also cater for the website.

The participants developed a set of questions to be answered in addressing the objectives of the workshop and in defining the outcomes

and the way forward for the meeting. The questions included the following:

- What type of content development is to be piloted?
- What are the needs to implement the SUCAPRI-COL platforms and content development to be supported by COL?

All these platforms were subjected to a common criteria evaluation and ranked as summarized in the table below. Upon ranking a choice of the platform was made.

COMMUNICATION PLATFORM EVALUATION

	CRITERIA	JOOMLA	DRUPAL
1	Simplicity and user friendliness	4	4
2	Feature comparison (Email, VOIP, SMS, Discussion Forums, Chat, Project Management, Communication Strategy and File Exchange)	5	4
3	Bandwidth optimization	3	4
4	Accessibility	4	4
5	Existing capacity within the SUCAPRI members	2	1
6	Community support	5	4
		23	21

E-PLATFORM EVALUATION

	Wiki	Moodle	Atutor
Collaborative content development	5	3	3
Wider stakeholder involvement	5	3	3
Rigorous quality assurance process	5	3	3
Support for learners activities	2	5	5
Pedagogical support and Web 2.0 support	4	4	4
Simplicity to use	5	2	2
Existing capacity within the SUCAPRI members	4	4	4
Offline use and support	4	4	4
TOTAL	34	28	28

The final choice of the communication platform was Joomla content management system integrated to existing mailing list. This choice was attributed mainly to the existence of skills within one of SUCAPRI's partners to deploy the platform

The choice of the eplatform rested on the WikiEducator platform and Moodle. The factors contributing to this decision are:

- Variable levels of access from open to closed relating to issues of quality standards, security and stage of product development
- Wider involvement of stakeholders
- Learner support and research on processes

All the chosen platforms were based on the same technical platform with similar programming languages, relational databases and web hosting platform

DAY 3 PROCEEDINGS

The third day focused on answering the questions defined on the second day. The following issues were addressed on the third day:

- What level of Openness or Closeness should the platform have?
- What is required to operationalize the platform?
- Who to undertake what responsibilities and when?
- What level and criteria for access and how will IPR be resolved?
- What criteria and content to be used in the pilot phase to test proof of concept that SUCAPRI-COL members can effectively communicate and jointly collaborate on content development?

What level of Openness or Closeness should the platform have?

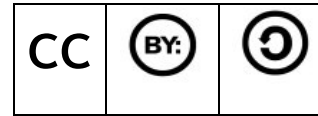
The members deliberated on the issue of Open or Closed Access and Open or closed licensing schemes. It was agreed that since one of the key objective of the SUCAPRI project is to engage in a research process that involves as many as is possible number of stakeholders, the platform should be able to support open communication and should be able to implement a licensing scheme that would also be able to facilitate contributions from all areas.

Though the process requires open access and contribution, at some point the status of the project would require to create sustainability and to provide a mechanism that can guarantee revenue generation and continuous content development. As a result, there is a need to have a platform that can be implemented with controlled access to only authorized students and SUCAPRI content developers. SUCAPRI see this as a way of raising funds through charging for course fees from students registered in participating educational institutions. This can be summarized that the final product should be closed but the process should be open. The level of openness and closeness access should be determined by:

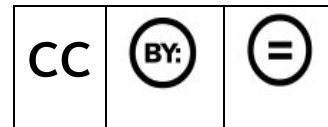
- Quality of the product and the specialized effort that SUCAPRI invests in the product
- Controlled access as a means of fund raising
- Various stages of product development

As to the licensing schemes to be implemented, the participants were introduced to the various creative commons licensing schemes by the COL Consultant following a discussion and a subsequent agreement that SUCAPRI will develop content as Open Educational Resources and allow other institutions to access the content as enhance it as part of sharing.

It was agreed that for content developed on the WikiEducator platform, the license that shall be used is the existing one i.e Creative Commons BY Share Alike. This license scheme was favorable because it will allow a broader sharing framework thus increasing participation and access to content hosted within the Wiki Platform. This will allow others to copy, distribute, display and perform copyright work but only if they give credit to the author. This will also force others to Share Alike redistributing derivative works under a license similar to the authors



On the other hand the license scheme that will be applied on content in Moodle will be Creative Commons with Attribution but No derivative works (ND) implying others can copy, redistribute but only verbatim copies and no derivative works



What is required to operationalize the platform?

In order to operationalize the platform it was agreed that the project should use existing resources within SUCAPRI members' institutions and that the platform should first be set-up before carrying out capacity building work is carried out. The following were the skillsets profiled in the various member institutions:

- Some existing technical skills in the development of dynamic websites and the use of Joomla Content Management System exist in Makerere University
- There is some existing skills in moodle implementation, instructional design and eContent Development skills in the Kenyatta University and Egerton University
- When required the member institutions can provide small back-up ICT infrastructure (Bandwidth and hosting space) within the Universities

There was also consensus on the fact that these resources were inadequate for the SUCAPRI requirements and that there is a need to strengthen existing capacity and operationalize the platform through:

1. **Capacity Building:** SUCAPRI will require training for educational Practitioners/Subject experts. The training required in this area includes:
 - Multimedia Content Development
 - Instructional Design
 - Online Course Management/Facilitation
 - Content Development in an open platform
 - Awareness creation
2. **Technical Support from COL:** As to the technical support required, SUCAPRI members will need to be equipped with skills in Linux Fundamentals and System Administration, Web Hosting and Advanced Multimedia content design.

SUCAPRI is also requesting COL to provide support in the setting up of the hosting infrastructure and the server space configured with the appropriate technical platform in order for SUCAPRI to begin work in this phase of the project. This technical platform will provide open source technologies (Linux Apache MySQL PHP -LAMP) required in the hosting of the platform

Each of the members of SUCAPRI will present for training key subject experts and selected technical people for the technical training so that they will be able to offer technical support to the lecturers and subject experts in digitalization, illustrations, simulations and animation

As part of capacity building initiative, SUCAPRI members will participate in the development of a short regional certification course targeting facilitators in rural innovation. During the project phase SUCAPRI will

team up with the member institutions to conduct the certification and to award certification.

A generic criteria for choosing content to be developed in this project is outlined below:

1. The course content developed must have a regional outlook and should support inter-institution collaboration
2. The course selected should be marketable and demand driven
3. The course content should address multi-disciplinary or inter sectoral needs
4. The course content should have perceived potential impact on livelihoods and should be focused on IAR4D and ICT4D

The potential candidates for courses meeting these criteria were identified as Horticulture, IAR4D, Agribusiness, ICT4D and Organic Farming among others

As a start, it was agreed that SUCAPRI in collaboration with COL can embark on a pilot project to develop IAR4D educational content in Team Building, Partnerships and Institutional Change as the major topics. Since some members of the team have been working in this area and have developed content in these areas, it was agreed that they submit to the COL Consultant their draft content materials for hosting within WikiEducator and for facilitating training for the development of the final courses.

3. ACTION PLAN

The participants agreed on an action plan that focused on the implementation of a pilot phase of content development in the three areas specified for IAR4D. The plan looks at achieving this by the 15th of April, 2007.

The table below summarizes the action plan

	Action Items	Responsible	Timelines
1	Establishment of e-platform	COL Consultant	31st of Dec, 2007
2	Uploading of draft IAR4D Content on platform	COL Consultant/ George Cheminigwa - UoN/ Jessica -KARI	31st of Dec, 2007
3	Establishment of the Joomla based communication platform	Makerere University	15th of Jan 2008
4	Institutional capacity building workshop	COL Consultant and JKUAT	15th of Feb, 2008
5	Content Development for 3 Elements of IAR4D	SUCAPRI	31st of Mar, 2008
6	Pilot Evaluation	SUCAPRI, COL and stakeholders	15th of Apr, 2008

4. CONCLUSION AND WORKSHOP STRATEGIC OUTCOMES

As conclusion, the workshop was able to deliver on its objectives and can be seen as being successful.

The workshop was able to achieve the following strategic outcomes as outputs:

1. The establishment of a long-term relationship between the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) and SUCAPRI focused on supporting a component within SUCAPRI which was not realized in the EU Support Funding
2. The establishment of a test case scenario in collaborative content development within the framework of open educational resources. This has the potential to grow and influence other educational institutions to participate in this model of content development. This will have a greater impact as more and more stakeholders adopt this approach
3. Established a mechanism to support the SUCAPRI project even after the completion of the support period from EU of 3 years. Content developed will be available for certification from various SUCAPRI members and will be a source of income for SUCAPRI to continue pursuing this objective into the long-term