



CEPHaS Project Briefing

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RECENT ACTIVITIES IN CAPACITY STRENGTHENING

Over the past few months, researchers at the Centre for Capacity Research (CCR) at the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, with support from Dr Lydia Chabala at the University of Zambia, have undertaken structured capacity assessments at the University of Zambia, Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR) in Malawi, and most recently at the University of Zimbabwe. The CCR team was given a warm welcome in each of the three partner institutions and was able to speak to a wide variety of research and support staff as well as visiting laboratories and other research facilities in each institution. It was exciting to see the new CEPHaS equipment being installed and hear first hand the benefits of CEPHaS participation already being felt by researchers in our southern African partner institutions.



Figure 1 A laboratory at LUANAR.

These capacity assessments are designed to assess research management and support capacities as well as strengths and weaknesses in current conservation agriculture research capacity. Findings from these baseline assessments will then be used to identify priority, institution-level capacity gaps that CEPHaS will aim to address over the course of the programme.

A two-person research team visited the University of Zambia from 5–9 November 2018. The assessment primarily focused on the Department of Soil Science (Faculty of Agricultural Science), however, central research management and support services (e.g. financial services, Information Communication Technology) were also included as far as possible. Data were collected from key informants through semi-structured interviews, document reviews and observations of facilities. The same process was repeated at LUANAR from 25 February–1 March 2019, with a focus on the Department of Crop and Soil Sciences (Faculty of Agriculture), and at the University of Zimbabwe, within the Department of Soil Science and Agricultural Engineering (Faculty of Agriculture) from 25–27 March 2019.



Figure 2 Equipment delivery at LUANAR.

ONGOING ACTIVITIES

The CCR team is currently analysing data collected during the assessment visits and writing reports that will be shared with the co-investigators at each institution and CEPHaS management team once finalised. In July, CCR will convene an action planning meeting at the annual CEPHaS meeting in Lusaka, Zambia. This action planning meeting will determine which of the capacity gaps identified during the assessment process will be identified for strengthening during the remaining course of the project.

The CEPHaS project is also part of a wider platform, comprised of multiple sub-Saharan African research capacity-



Figure 3 A teaching lab at LUANAR.



Figure 4 On the job training with new soil physics field equipment at UNZA.



Figure 5 New CEPHaS equipment installed at the University of Zambia.



Figure 6 Soil Physics equipment set up at University of Zimbabwe.

strengthening (RCS) consortia, in which the CCR is applying a standard set of predetermined indicators to track and document institutional-level research capacity-strengthening outcomes. Combined data from this broader platform will allow us to identify common institutional-level research capacity challenges across Africa as well as effective interventions, highlighting priority investment areas for current and future RCS programmes.

WHO ARE WE?

We are soil scientists, agronomists, hydrogeologists, geophysicists, statisticians and agricultural economists from the University of Zimbabwe, the University of Zambia, Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources, the University of Nottingham, Rothamsted Research, Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine and the British Geological Survey. We are also joined by Kasisi Agricultural Training Centre as an NGO partner.

Together we constitute a unique multidisciplinary team with a wide range of experience, including in capacity strengthening.

OUR PARTNERS

We are working with the Zambian Agriculture Research Institute (ZARI), the Department for Agricultural Research Services (Malawi), and our commercial partner, Delta-T Devices (UK).



HOW CAN I FIND OUT MORE?

- Contact your appropriate country lead (see below).
- Contact the principal investigator (see below).
- Look out for opportunities to attend project stakeholder workshops.
- If you wish to subscribe to this series of project briefings, please contact the principal investigator by email.



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