

Research access enables agricultural entrepreneurship

Academics, students and agricultural women's groups collaborate to put African research knowledge into practice



A group effort: Students at Moshi Co-operative University shared findings from research literature searches with female agricultural workers in order to improve cassava production

Eradicating poverty represents an enormous global challenge, but it is one that must be overcome if we are to see sustainable global development. The commitment to root out poverty is affirmed in the first Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) – “End poverty in all its forms everywhere” – and, indeed, is one of the fundamental goals of the international community and the entire United Nations system.

One step towards reducing poverty is ensuring that people have access to decent work. This is reflected in the eighth SDG, which states: “Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all”. Part of securing decent work for all involves ensuring that people have access to the latest knowledge and skills in their respective fields. Without this, workers and business owners will not follow best practices and they will be less productive. They will also be less likely to innovate.

A recent INASP-funded project developed an evidence-based approach to improving entrepreneurship and innovation in Tanzania. It did this by training academics and students to access and review the wealth of literature available on entrepreneurship innovation and management and, subsequently, facilitating collaboration with agricultural women's groups.

The project, which took place in Tanzania between February and June 2016, was carried out by the Co-operative Entrepreneurship and Innovation Centre (CEIC) of





From literature to field: female cassava producers build on knowledge from agricultural developments in Ghana and Nigeria

the Institute of Continuing and Co-operative Education at Moshi Co-operative University.

Improving awareness of research access

As a member of the Consortium of Tanzania Universities and Libraries (COTUL), the library at Moshi Co-operative University gives staff and students access to a vast body of research literature thanks to agreements negotiated

with INASP's partner publishers. However, students and staff have not always been aware of the resources that they have available.

A new INASP innovation grant has helped library staff to conduct training sessions and seminar discussions to address this challenge. The project helped raise awareness about the resources available through COTUL, as well as highlighting relevant open-access journals. Afterwards, many of the participants admitted that previously they had not been

aware of how easy it was to access this valuable information.

"The staff and students were excited to discover the plethora of literature available online from INASP's publisher partners – and 70% of the third-year students agreed that their research references had improved by the time they submitted their final research report," said Damian Sambuo, Coordinator of Co-operative Entrepreneurship and Innovation Centre of Moshi Co-operative University.

"The project is a testament to the effectiveness of successful collaboration between university staff, students and agricultural women's groups, and shows that access to e-research has a positive impact on entrepreneurship and innovation."

Damian Sambuo, Coordinator of Co-operative Entrepreneurship and Innovation Centre, Moshi Co-operative University

Entrepreneurship students at the university then trawled the literature to identify suitable innovative approaches that could help boost entrepreneurship and economic productivity in small businesses in Tanzania. They discovered an approach in Ghana and Nigeria to add value to the growth of the staple crop cassava and identified this as having potential for agriculture in Tanzania. The students then took this knowledge and trained female

“Before, we didn’t have these seeds to plant cassava – this training helped us so much that we are surely going to harvest enough cassava to meet our food demands.”

Sauda, cassava producer, Makiba village

From research to real-life improvements



As well as providing food for the household and feed for livestock, cassava can also be used as the raw material in a wide range of value-added products, including flour. Students at Moshi University, as a result of training in e-resource access, identified approaches already being used in Ghana and Nigeria that could be used to improve cassava production in Tanzania.

Following the discovery of these approaches in the literature, the group of students took their findings into the field. They identified two groups of female cassava producers in Makiba village (Arusha region) and Makuyuni village (Kilimanjaro region) to undergo training by university personnel to add value to their cassava crops by producing flour. Some 30 women in Makiba village and 27 women in Makuyuni village received training courses on entrepreneurship.

The women in the two groups benefited hugely from the training they received, with the Makiba group seeing a 16% increase in the size of their group by the end of the project. Moreover, each of the women is now required to give cassava seeds free of charge to five other women within a community of her choice every season, thereby increasing food production and further improving women’s incomes.

“Before, we didn’t have these seeds to plant cassava – this training helped us so much that we are surely going to harvest enough cassava to meet our food demands,” explained Sauda, one of the women from the Makiba group.





Cassava is a staple crop for feeding people and livestock in many African countries

The project

Project objectives

Improve entrepreneurship and innovation by:

- Providing up-to-date info on successful approaches, techniques and tailor-made programmes, which can be adopted by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)
- Develop an evidence base of innovative ideas, which can be implemented and published online and thus be further improved, tested and disseminated
- Improve knowledge and skills of academic staff and students when it comes to accessing and using research literature
- Encourage collaboration between academics and co-operative societies to support innovative approaches for entrepreneurship

Project activities

- Provide access to research literature on entrepreneurship innovation and management for academic staff and students at the MoCU library
- Review online documents and literature on successful approaches, techniques and tailor-made programmes, which could be adopted by SMEs in Tanzania
- Establish a monthly routine of meeting in seminars/workshops to discuss the research literature found, and select innovative approaches and techniques that could be tested in the Tanzanian context
- Visit two women's groups to educate them about the entrepreneurship approaches selected from the online literature

“Access to INASP [-facilitated] publications helped us to use academic resources to improve rural livelihoods. The project can be a blueprint for using other online innovations to improve the knowledge and skills of both academics and non-academics.”

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cassava producers in the new approaches.

The project was important as it equipped university staff and students with the tools to unlock and access the detailed research knowledge freely available online. Constructive discussions led to innovative ideas about how this knowledge could be best applied in the Tanzanian context and to dynamic collaboration with women's groups. The interventions made a tangible difference to the lives of the agricultural women, helping to improve their economic situations, secure their livelihoods and contribute to the socioeconomic wellbeing of their families and communities.

"The project was a testament to the effectiveness of successful collaboration between university staff, students and agricultural women's groups, and showed that access to e-research has a positive impact on entrepreneurship and innovation," noted Sambuo.

"Access to INASP publications helped us to use academic resources to improve rural



CEIC guest speaker shares practical experience, sensitizes and leads student discussion on the need of cassava flour to rural women

livelihoods," he continued "The project can be a blueprint for using other online innovations to improve the knowledge and skills of both academics and non-academics."

Future plans

Going forward, plans are in place for staff and students at the university to conduct field research among entrepreneurial women's groups every year,

thus ensuring the long-term sustainability of these collaborations. Also, 90% of the project survey respondents agreed that the approach would be helpful for students, academics and rural households if it were extended to other groups in the future. The participants also identified a need to increase the availability of technical information, such as practical information about how to process cassava flour into starch.

"We didn't know we could use MoCU library password to login onto [online literature] – this is wonderful. Now I can access a lot of journals to improve my research."

Aurelia Isaack, third-year undergraduate Business Economics student, Moshi Co-operative University

