

ZAMBIAN INSTITUTE OF AGRICULTURE DIPLOMA COURSE: PROGRESS

Since inception in 2007, the Zambian Institute of Agriculture (ZAI) has been involved in agriculture research, consultancy and community trainings. Early 2017 the institute decided to begin offering a distance-learning diploma course in agriculture. The course was designed with eight subjects, each subject to be taught in one week residential lectures, every four months. Initially the course was designed and planned to commence in August, with the first one week's residential course taking place from the 13th to 18th August 2017.

The course was advertised through the TAA to seek interested experts to offer their time and expertise through offering voluntary lectures. ZAI offered to arrange their flight and stay expenses while in Zambia conducting lectures.

Potential students were missed due to delayed opening of the session, which was as a result of delayed authorisation by the government. This resulted in repeated date changes for the first TAA volunteer instructor. Unfortunately the changed dates in October proved to be unsuitable for this instructor.

The course went ahead with only 8 students. Chris Kapembwa (founder of ZAI) and Allan, a prominent local farmer, delivered the lectures. Classroom lectures were delivered by Chris and farm lectures by Allan on his farm. The course was supervised by an Employee from Syngenta, who was a specialist in seed technology and marketing.

The next session is scheduled for 12 December 2017 in Farm Management and Extension. This is a locally designed course. Having international Instructors offering their time provides great opportunity and assistance to ZAI, however the arrangements and time of offering the session may change at anytime, which may be inconvenient to the men and women who have generously volunteered to offer their time and expertise for the course. This was experienced with the first session and may happen with future sessions: this is a new venture, still at the test stage and dependent on student tuition fees to fund local facilities and expenses of resource persons.

The ZAI management believes the course to be of great importance to both farmers and the students who undertake it: there is need for such a vocational training course in agriculture, which brings in much time for practical agriculture content, unlike most institutions that spend so much time in theories. This gives us much confidence that, despite financial challenges, alternatives have to be found to ensure that the course is carried out so that we can meet our goal of bridging the knowledge gap created by the lack of practical agriculture-based trainings in Zambia.

ZAI wishes to take this opportunity to request that our supporters, helpers and those who have offered to give their time and expertise towards this course, to bear with us and try to be flexible in their calendars. This will assist all of us to reduce the stress caused by date changes until the course has stabilised financially. During the preparation stage we were misled with the overwhelming response that indicated 35 students registering (10 more than our planned 25). Unfortunately, due to the delays, we lost almost all them and had to restart the recruiting process.

We will still appreciate if the generous volunteers, even those who were unable meet revised time inputs on this first course, can still offer their time during the next course intake. We value the Instructors' offer as a great support and help and we do not take it for granted. This time the Institute financially is not able to engage paid up instructors even locally. We have pledged to continue engaging in communications with our Instructors whenever we can, to ensure that they are updated on our progress, particularly in the first three sessions.

This is a locally based course focusing on sustainable agriculture best practice systems. We invite everyone with funding links and funding opportunities towards agriculture activities for African Institutions to come on board and work with the ZAI to enhance its resource capacity for it to attain its objectives and goals.

ZAI is very grateful to all our partners and all those who have taken time to mentor and encourage us in this Journey, specifically all those who have offered their time and resources towards this course. We particularly take this opportunity to appreciate the TAA, which published our course immediately we announced it and for so many TAA members taking an interest. We also wish to thank TAA member Martin Kaonga, head of the Cambridge Centre for Environment, for guidance in setting up the diploma course.

Prepared by Christopher Pannet Kapembwa. President, Zambian Institute of Agriculture; Coordinator, TAA Zambia and Southern Africa. October 2017