Training guide on placement of NARS students and trainees at agricultural training institutions

Conseil Ouest et Centre Africain pour la Recherche et le Développement Agricoles

West and Central African Council for Agricultural Research and Development
Introduction

1. Agricultural training institutions in this training guide refer to all technical and management institutions that offer certificate and higher degrees in agriculture and related courses. This includes faculty and college of agriculture of the university, technical and management training institutions, Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) Centers, and Advanced Research Institutes (ARIs).

2. Although each National Agricultural Research System (NARS), especially the National Agricultural Research Institutes (NARIs) are aware of their capacity strengthening needs, these are however not well documented. The NARS are therefore encouraged to use the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA)-commissioned NARS assessment report on “Agricultural research delivery in Africa: An assessment of the requirements for efficient, effective and productive national agricultural research system in Africa”, published in March 2006, as one of the reference materials on priority capacity strengthening areas. This report should help NARS managers especially at the NARIs, to make informed strategic decisions on capacity investments in agricultural research and development in their respective countries.

3. Although Conseil ouest et centre africain pour la recherche et le développement agricole/West and Central Africa Council for Agricultural Research and Development (CORAF/WECARD) is not a donor, it mobilises resources from national governments and development partners on behalf of its constituents in West and Central Africa, to strengthen agricultural research and development capacity. Some of these resources target the strengthening of NARS human capacity from certificate to higher degree level at agricultural training institutions within and outside Africa.

4. Therefore, CORAF/WECARD managed fellowships are generally offered through competition between and among its stakeholders including staff of the Secretariat1 through an ‘Open Fellowship Call’ posted on its website www.coraf.org. Under certain situations however, Managers of NARS institutions may be requested to directly nominate

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1. To respond to Governing Board recommendation on career development for CORAF/WECARD Secretariat Staff.
candidates. The time scale of each training offer will be stated on each ‘Open Fellowship Call’ or request for nominations to Managers of NARS institutions.

5. Selection of qualified NARS candidates will be carried out by CORAF/WECARD’s Scientific and Technical Committee (STC) in close consultation with the management, based on agreed criteria.

6. The fellowships will target a wide range of agriculture and related disciplines including information and communication technology, documentation and publication, library science, research management etc.

7. Each participating agricultural training institution must appoint a ‘focal person’ through whom all matters related to students awarded with the CORAF/WECARD fellowships can be addressed.

8. NARS applicants must have a letter of support from their institutions when applying for fellowships. Selected NARS candidates should directly apply to training institutions identified through the ‘Open Fellowship Call’. When they have been offered admission by a training institution, they must present evidence of their admission to CORAF/WECARD management through the head of their institutions. CORAF/WECARD will then provide information on the full conditions of the fellowship to both the head of the NARS institution and the successful NARS candidate.
9. CORAF/WECARD will sign an Agreement or Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the training institutions offering admission to the student(s). The Agreement or MoU with training institutions once signed, will form the basis for ‘new’ or additional training opportunities outside the existing one. Each Agreement or MoU will, however, have an agreed time-frame, after which it can be renegotiated for renewal.

Minimum criteria for the selection of NARS candidates

10. NARS stakeholders as well as CORAF/WECARD secretariat staff are eligible to respond to the ‘Open Fellowship Call’, and women and youth candidates are strongly encouraged to apply. At least 30% women and/or youth candidates from NARS are preferred for each set of fellowship awards.

11. Selected NARS candidates should preferably be around 40 years at the start of the course. In special cases however, NARS candidates who have up to 10 years service to retirement with their national institutions after completion of their study, are also eligible to apply.

12. All selected NARS candidates must sign a bond to ‘return and serve’ with their employer institution(s) based on existing national institutions’ rules and procedures.
13. NARS staff already holding higher degrees will not be allowed to undertake similar higher degree training.

14. All beneficiary institutions will be strongly encouraged to place returning NARS students at the appropriate place and level within their institution soon after successful completion of the course and students’ return to the country.

15. Although candidates with BSc degree are preferred for higher degree training, the faculty and/or College of Agriculture will be encouraged to consider candidates who have diploma with distinction or equivalent in addition to a minimum of 5 years on-the-job experience.

16. CORAF/WECARD Planning and M&E Unit in collaboration with the Knowledge Management and Capacity Strengthening Programme will monitor the progress of students through the training institution(s).

Maintaining students at training institutions

17. The full cost implication (tuition, books, dissertation/thesis, bench/lab fees, supervision of thesis/dissertation, accommodation, stipend, insurance, game fees, etc.) of each student at any training institution will be based on information and data on either: (i) cost estimates by the development partner, foundation, or government offering the fellowship through CORAF/WECARD; and (ii) University and/or technical/professional training institution offering admission to selected student(s). In both cases, CORAF/WECARD will use this data and information to compare and contrast with similar organisations that have students at these training institutions. This will form the basis for determining student benefits and further review as appropriate.

18. Because of the experience of a chronic systemic challenge in fund disbursement and transfer between and among organisations offering the fellowship on the one hand and beneficiary organisation(s) and student(s) on the other through the banks, student/trainees starter funds will be placed at training institutions in advance of the arrival of students/trainees to enable them settle well and avoid distress and undue hardship.

19. Each training institution must ensure that information about the course(s) they offer as well as costs, academic
and administrative requirements are available to potential student applicants through the most cost effective means. Although training institutions websites and brochures are useful tools, these institutions will be further required to ensure that potential student applicants and CORAF/WECARD are fully informed about courses offered, duration of each course, and its cost implication.

20. While it is evident that NARS students will undertake full course work at training institutions, they will preferably be required to conduct their thesis/dissertation: (i) in their country or other similar environments; and (ii) in the absence of that, other institutions as may be agreed upon between the parties.

21. University and/or training institutions must ensure that supervision of higher degree student thesis/dissertation is through ‘joint supervision’ by both the university supervisor and local supervisor at a place where the work is being carried out. Joint supervision at both levels must be adequately resourced and incentives provided for local supervision.

22. While students are conducting their thesis/dissertation, they will continue to receive their full fellowship entitlements. Their institutions will also be encouraged to provide logistical and material support to the students as may be required, and not to distract the students from their thesis/dissertation. Both training institution and local on-site supervisors must ensure that the students finish their course work and thesis as scheduled. In that regard, the students must also take full responsibility to ensure that they complete on schedule.

23. Training institutions must give periodic, timely and detailed student progress reports to CORAF/WECARD in accordance with the Agreement/MoU.

24. The Office of the Registrar or other designated authority of each training institution shall be the authentic source of communication to and from CORAF/WECARD on matters related to student affairs. Although good student/training institution supervisor relationship will be encouraged, CORAF/WECARD will act on student demand(s) and issue(s) only if they originate from the Office of the Registrar or designated authority. Direct request(s) from students’ supervisor(s) will be regarded as unofficial and only for information.
25. CORAF/WECARD will visit and hold discussions with the training institutions’ authority at least once every year. The agency offering the fellowship through CORAF/WECARD may also visit and hold discussions with the same authority.

26. Although faculty and/or college of agriculture offer short-term NARS skills development courses, most of the technical, managerial and leadership skill needs of the NARS exist outside mainstream tertiary education. Advanced Research Institutes, CGIAR Centers and other specialised regional and sub-regional institutions appear to be well placed in providing skills and competence, tailormade for NARS capacity strengthening services. Short-term technical and managerial training needs of the NARS will therefore be contracted to the most appropriate provider(s) for any particular training need.

27. Computers (laptop, accessories and anti-virus software) will be provided for each beneficiary student who is pursuing a degree course. Although each beneficiary student will have full and unlimited access and control over the ICT material, these remain the property of the employee organisation and as may be stipulated by the organisation offering the fellowship, could also remain the property of that organisation. Should the student permanently leave the employee organisation, he/she must handover the computers and accessories to the organisation he/she is leaving.

28. On completion of their study, each returning student will be offered excess baggage to take back materials acquired during his/her study. The equivalent in kilogramme (kg) will be determined by CORAF/WECARD.

29. Further, supporting the reintegration process of students to their respective national systems is an important part of the training process and this should be supported by funding agencies. Graduate students indicated that the reintegration support empowered them to gain confidence to engage more productively with both the Management of their organisation and the clients they serve.

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Vision

A sustainable reduction in poverty and food insecurity in West and Central Africa through increased agriculture-led economic growth and improvements in key aspects of the agricultural research system

Mission

Sustainable improvements in agricultural productivity, competitiveness and markets in West and Central Africa by meeting the key demands of the sub-regional research system as expressed by target groups

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