

Feed the Future Legume Innovation Lab
Report on Site visit KSU, September 6-8, 2016

Cynthia Donovan, MO

Constance Gewa, TMAC

The site visit to Kansas State University was designed with three basic objectives: 1) Gain insights into progress, challenges; 2) Review the work plan; and 3) Review administrative concerns and budgeting/contracting issues. Additionally we talked to university administration to understand how they view the Feed the Future Legume Innovation Lab program within the university and how we might improve on collaboration and performance.

The schedule of meetings for the site visit can be found in Annex 1. List of persons met can be found in Annex 2. Our accommodations were at the Bluemont Hotel. We highly recommend it as it is convenient with excellent facilities.

Constance Gewa and I arrived at KSU on the afternoon of September 6 and were met by Vincent and Kara. We used the time in the early evening to review the schedule and talk a bit more about the site visit.

Meeting with Paul Lowe (Contracts and Grants):

Wednesday morning we met first thing with Paul Lowe. He stressed his view that they are facilitators for the researchers to do the international work. Given his role in contract administration at KSU, it was valuable to discuss with him the challenges of managing the host country contracts under USAID. When asked about their approach to working within the new Uniform Guidelines limiting the value of fixed price contracts, he indicated that they are using advances to ensure that counterpart institutions in host countries have sufficient liquidity to enable them to operate. He indicated that it required more proactive monitoring with subcontractors. His office has always tried to evaluate “deal breakers” indicating things such as the human trafficking regulations that a subcontractor of KSU must have in place to get contracts. To determine amount of advance, they estimate cost of initial work and advance just enough for that.

We discussed with Paul options for bringing on previous host country students to assist with in-country analysis and writing. For some of the work with KSU, they are thinking it might be done as a consultancy with local partner, rather than funds through a host country; the expenditure would appear as US for host country rather than host country directly. We discussed the disconnect between the USAID aspirations for these Innovation Labs and the reality/incentives, especially regarding long term training and host country institutional development. For academic institutions, the host country faculty are held accountable for teaching only; whereas these IL programs engage in research and teaching; thus our host country partners do not have the same incentives or motivation for research that US faculty have.

Meeting with Vincent and Kara

We had an introductory meeting with Kara and Vincent to discuss the strategy for the project, what has been accomplished and where they expect to be by the end of the project. The choice experiments with the consumers in key cities in each country have been conducted and the data are ready for analysis.

Now the key challenge is getting the people on board for analysis and writing, for their collaborators are swamped with teaching responsibilities. Kara showed us some preliminary results from the three countries. We discussed the research that was based mainly on market classes, for consumers were shown physical examples of beans available on the local market and asked to select their top four, ranking them in order. Questions were then asked about what they liked and what was important.

Vincent has been working with Lawrence in Malawi to develop the idea of a recipe contest, like a Pulse Feast and a campaign to put beans at the “center of the plate.” A local outside agency (private sector) would organize the campaign events. Beans are mainly regarded as a condiment in the region, so having main dishes based on beans is seen as a consumer demand strategy. They had an excellent experience with a restaurateur in Zambia who started developing more bean stews and dishes and developed a strong clientele base with diverse bean dishes.

Meeting with Allen Featherstone (Dept. Chair and co-PI), Kara and Vincent

We talked about the relationship of the SO2.2 project and Innovation Labs in general to the department and to professors within the department. Capacity building is seen as a critical contribution with longer term impacts. They are tracking the MAB students, for example, to later be able to tell the story. Training students in value chains helps them to view products from farm to market and identify what is needed. The consumer preferences aspects of the research are really key input for breeders and they worked to ensure that linkage.

They recognize the challenge that academics in sub-Saharan Africa face. At their universities, research is not encouraged and their performance is judged on teaching. They tend to have very high student loads, leaving little time for research. This lack of incentive to dedicate time to research has repercussions for their research program. Their PI on Tanzania is now department chair, adding even more challenges to getting his time and efforts. Currently they are looking at how to form teams of at least two PIs in country, so that there is some sharing of responsibilities. Generally, they see the need for more face time of US PIs with host country PIs and some of that could be best done in the US. Thus site visits might occur in US as well as host country, with seminars and more focused time on research.

Legume Scholar Pacem Kotchofa

We met with Pacem Kotchofa, the Legume Scholar working with Vincent and Kara. There has been a misunderstanding with her program that we are working to clear up. Ousmane Coulibaly had thought that he was the research lead on her PhD program and thus was communicating directly with Pacem about what she should be doing and not working with Vincent. Pacem felt torn between two people directing her program. Vincent and Kara agreed to reach out to Ousmane to clear up the confusion so that there is better coordination and the research is seen as more collaborative. Pacem seemed relieved that the issue would be addressed.

Budgeting discussion with Vincent and Kara:

They recognize the large amount of funding that has been obligated but not yet invoiced or possibly spent. There are invoices that need to be sent to spend down funds, but there may be issues with reaching full expenditure on the project total. They acknowledge that it has been difficult getting timely invoices and in one case, money was sent and the PI was unable to access it, was told that the funds had not arrived (Sokoine). We agreed that they would work to develop a budget soon for drawing down on

the funds, indicating how the funds would be spent to achieve the objectives in the workplan. I suggested that they make sure to work through this before early next year so that we can tell Vern to reduce the funds to us if KSU will be unable to spend down their funds and needs a de-obligation. They agreed that they could live with a no-cost extension now, but if the contracting was already moving forward, that was fine. They will work with it.

A key challenge for them has been that host country researchers are committed to their teaching responsibilities and do not have much time available for other activities, including LIL research. They have thus not been fully using the LIL funds for research and the universities often slow down researcher access to funds for research. The project has seen that presence of the KSU PIs is often necessary to get things moving, thus slowing the research and research expenditures down. One approach may be to work with host country students after they graduate as a practical training, under contract to produce key outputs.

One activity mentioned was a Pulse Feast type of event. This stems from their research indicating that consumers view beans more as a side, a condiment, rather than a dish for the “center of the plate.” Hence, they wish to have an event in Malawi for the Intl Year of Pulses that would present beans and other legumes in this new light, with a recipe contest and other activities. Linkages with the private sector would be enhanced with such an event. They were considering contracting an outside local private group to organize the event. (After the site visit, on Sept. 27, CXD contacted Vincent and Kara about the event and requested that they incorporate it into the work plan and budget so that the TMAC and MO can review the activity and view it within the context of project objectives and milestones.)

Various meetings:

Agnes Mzyece, graduate student

Agnes received partial funding from us under the Pulse Value Chain Initiative (PCVI) with funding from Dry Grain Pulses (DGP) CRSP for her undergraduate degree at University of Zambia, working with Gelson Tembo and Vincent. Since then, she has gotten her MS degree from KSU with a Fulbright scholarship and is continuing on for the PhD with Ghana USAID Mission funds. After she finished her first degree at UNZA she worked at the Central Statistical Office and then at World Vision in monitoring and evaluation and then had a job with MUSIKA a Zambian non-profit company working to stimulate private sector investment in smallholder agriculture and markets. She indicated that Edna, yet another of the PCVI graduates under DGP CRSP funding, is in the Masters in Agribusiness (MAB) program at KSU with Muzika paying part of the fees, yet another way to get a degree that lends itself to parents who cannot travel away for long periods of time.

She has had positive experiences with her education but believes that there is a great need to get information to potential students about funding opportunities, especially at US universities. Research and teaching assistantships are not commonly known as possibilities for funding for example. She agrees that most students use their social networks, especially professors and others who have previously studied abroad, to try to identify new opportunities. We talked about how establishing some social network communications might be valuable.

John Floros, Dean of the College of Agriculture

The Dean is well aware of the Innovation Labs and the importance for their international programs. He suggested looking for geographic zones of overlap where there might be synergies, such as Ethiopia in the future. He sees engagement in the Innovation Labs as a win-win proposition for the university and host countries/USAID.

Marcelo Sabatés (Assoc. Provost, KSU Office of Intl Programs) and Marcellus Caldas (Asst. Provost, Intl Faculty Collaborations and Educational Programs, KSU Office of Intl. Programs)

The work of the international programs office focuses primarily on student exchange programs. They also assist visiting faculty in making a connection with relevant KSU faculty for a sabbatical visit. They do work with foundations that support faculty sabbaticals and travel and the belief is that this is valuable to the teaching mission of the university. Zamarano has been a key source of high quality students. They lobby for the importance of research in developing a better teaching program. They commonly have short stays for foreign faculty arriving. They participate in the Young African Leadership Institute (YALI), a joint program among universities. They are active with Partners of the Americas and the KSU link is with Paraguay, and they give in state tuition and other benefits to encourage students. They are interested in establishing "Partners of Africa", with different states having different partner countries in Africa.