

Project summary

Strengthening Sustainable Agriculture in South Africa



The South African agricultural sector is going through a turbulent period. On the one hand the highly productive sector is an important engine of national economic growth; on the other hand it is faced with degrading soils, water shortages, and regularly occurring adverse climate conditions. But above all the sector is confronted with political demands for land re-distribution to open up the sector for black South Africans previously disadvantaged during the Apartheid era.

The situation is compounded by a growing demand for (safe and healthy) food, feed, fiber and (bio)fuel by a growing population that is increasingly urbanised, and increasingly more affluent. The question that is raised today is to what extent the conventional production-driven (largely white South African-owned) agriculture should not be seriously reformed to meet future demands.

Innovations in tertiary education

The above extremely complex problem has to be addressed from many different angles. One of them is through innovation in agricultural education. From 2012 to 2016 Wageningen University and Stellenbosch University in the Western Cape jointly developed a new MSc programme on Sustainable Agriculture. The second one of this nature in South Africa.

Title: Strengthening Sustainable Agriculture in South Africa (NICHE-ZAF-118)

Start: 15 October 2011

End: 15 September 2016

Client(s): EP-Nuffic

Budget: 1,000,000 EUR

Partners: Wageningen University; Van Hall Larenstein

Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation (CDI) is the knowledge broker of Wageningen University & Research. We foster and contribute to sustainable and inclusive food systems through actions in four specified and interlinked focus areas: Agriculture and Markets, Climate and Environment, Food and Nutrition, and Governance and Partnerships. Our staff has the unique combination of substantive knowledge, an international network and excellent process management qualities.

The aim of the programme is to prepare young professionals to play a constructive role in remodelling the agricultural sector in the country by including labour relations, land distribution, gender considerations, a biodiversity conservation and socio-economic agenda as parameters of agricultural development. The promise of this agro-system approach rather than solely agro-production approach is that it brings the sector more in line with the sustainable development goals that the world has signed up to.

Apart from innovation in content, the 5-year project offered innovation in teaching approaches: competence-based, student-centred and interactive methods, as well as innovation in the way that the Stellenbosch Faculty of Agro-science is organising its education. Rather than offering a mono-disciplinary 2-years research master organised by one of the 11 Departments, the Sustainable Agriculture in South Africa (SASA) MSc is designed and delivered as a 2-years taught master in an interdisciplinary manner by a team of staff members from all departments.

The development of the MSc over the years was accompanied by an interdisciplinary research programme on sustainable agriculture with the intention to regularly adapt the MSc on the basis of the latest

insights in an international domain that is continuously reinventing itself.

Working together

To develop a new educational programme that has societal relevance it is of key importance to engage the private sector, NGOs such as Conservation South Africa (CSA) and other stakeholders. They are the ones to provide future employment to the graduates. Numerous events were organised, internships and student research assignments arranged to consolidate the emerging partnership and jointly design quality education.

Results so far

The SASA MSc was accredited in 2013 and since then 3 student intakes enrolled. The first batch of 5 students graduated early 2016. All five of them have furthered their career in the sustainable agriculture domain. Stellenbosch university has consolidated its reputation in the agricultural education sector with an highly innovative and market-driven MSc programme producing students that will shape the future.

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