

Some Research Problems in Higher Learning Institutions: A Case Study of Jimma College of Agriculture

Waktole Sori*

Introduction

Jimma College of Agriculture (JCA) is one of the oldest, probably the first, agricultural colleges in Ethiopia. It is located about 335 km west of the capital city, Addis Ababa. Currently, the College has four departments. They are departments of plant sciences, horticulture, general agriculture, and animal sciences. Every year students are assigned to each department based on their choices and academic performances.

The Department of Horticulture is a newly opened department in 1999, to train students at both diploma and degree levels. The first batch of the diploma level trainees graduated in 2000/01 and degree level trainees are planned to graduate in 2002/03. This is the significant achievement of the college in almost half a century.

Students in the different departments were trained by different instructors with different fields of specialization or may be, some times, by invited guest lecturers in some fields of specialization. Some of these academic staff, besides teaching, undertake research work. Before listing some of the problems the staff face it is worth mentioning at this juncture the relevance of research for a given nation.

About Research

Generally the objectives of higher learning institutions, besides teaching, are to conduct research and disseminate the results for the users at various levels as required. Research is an important tool for growth, technological advancement and societal welfare. It is

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because of this that all higher learning institutions should encourage, motivate and provide their academic staff members with, at least, the minimum necessary facilities and training opportunities for a successful achievement of their ultimate goals.

It is important to note that poverty, malnutrition, shortage of health and education services are some of the most important problems of our society at large. An attempt to solve these problems is also the priority agenda of the government today. These problems can be reduced to some extent through an intervention by integrated approach of research activities at all levels. This is because research generates knowledge on essential developmental issues and conditions. It brings about increased production and productivity.

Research programs need crucial thinking to bring about innovations and motivations to solve the basic and deep-rooted problems mentioned above. However, it is sad to say that most of the academic staff members of higher institutions of learning are not engaged in research activities. At present, the research activities/programs at Jimma College of Agriculture are accompanied by a host of problems some which are the concern of this study.

This study, as clearly indicated in the title, is based on:

- observation
- the complaints of some of the academic staff members.

Some of the Problems*

I hope the readers understand that it is difficult to mention, discuss, and suggest recommendations on the problems of research at JCA exhaustively on a paper with a limited scope like this one. However, one may clearly mention the obvious ones such as the following:

* **Note:** It should be noted that these problems are not mentioned in order of their importance.

Research Funding

It is a known fact that without fund there is no as such a research activity. This problem is crucial when it comes to agricultural research activities which need frequent field visits. There is no annually allocated government fund for research activities at JCA except for a small amount of money from the Ethiopian Science and Technology Commission (ESTC) and Ethiopian Agricultural Research Organization (EARO), which is not easily secured without a number of ups and downs.

To improve the research undertakings in the college an increase in fund allocation towards research is indispensable. Especially local funding must be made available if reliable and long-term research activities that contribute towards poverty alleviation are to be carried out.

Inadequate Research Infrastructure

Research infrastructure availability is very much important to execute research activities. The infrastructure are: *capital equipment* such as computing machines, printing machines, internet facilities; *library resources* such as journals, magazines, handout, periodicals, proceedings, etc, *research supplies* such as chemicals; *trained laboratory technicians and experienced personnel in purchasing equipment and supplies*. The research infrastructure available at JCA are very much limited and their maintenance is also very poor and hence they have constrained the limited research activities undertaken at JCA.

Lack of Transport Facilities

Most researchers rely on transport facilities of the college for their field trip. Most agricultural research activities, because of their very nature, are accompanied by field work which require transport vehicles. The Research and Publication Office (RPO) of the college has no transport facilities to be used by the researchers for research

Office (RPO), the relation between RPO and other authorities of the college, advisors of senior students and RPO. Some times administrators and the researchers do not speak the same language. To improve the research atmosphere of the college these have to be improved positively.

Undefined Research Priority and Strategy that Solve the Problems of End Users.

There is no defined vision in the context of research at the college because of the many reasons mentioned in different fora or publications. This has affected the positive development of research activities and the effective utilization of the scarce resources available. Therefore, research problems and strategies of how to solve those problems have to be developed at college level.

Poor Inservice Training

Training updates one's understanding of new technological developments and innovations. Especially it is quite important for junior academic staff to help them understand practical problems, to get information, to write proposals and reports; collect, organize, summarize, analyze data, and interpret and present the results.

Absence of Consultancy Services in the Area

Consultancy services are important for researchers to help them understand the practical problems of the end users/stakeholders, access experiences and additional sources of income and to make them competitive scholars and instructors. However, there is no forum of advertisement about what the college has and what it does.

Shortage of Senior Competent and Intelligent Staff

Because of some of the problems mentioned above, there are very few senior academic staff in the college. This has negatively affected

the attempts to create motivation and encouragement among the young academic staff.

Absence of Incentives and Recognition for High Quality Research Findings

Reward encourages and brings motivation to people but it is not exercised in most of our government institutions. This is true of JCA. However, I have a strong feeling that, if we develop the culture of rewarding some one for doing something worthwhile to the nation we can develop the culture of research interest.

Poor Linkage with National and International Institution and Organisation (Government and Non-government)

Limitation of Land suitable for Agricultural Research Undertakings

Conclusion

The problems identified, if positively solved, have significant input towards the improvement of the research atmosphere at JCA. Nevertheless, since the problems are identified based on short period personal observation, research has to be conducted to support these observations.

To solve these problems the college in cooperation with Jimma University, Ministry of Education, Ethiopian Agricultural Research Organization and ESTC has to take these points into consideration and also to put an effort to tackle them.

Above all, there should be an attitudinal change toward research activities if we are to mitigate the problems affecting the livelihood of our society. There should be a concern for research by the researchers, policy makers, farmers, and other stakeholders to bring about increased production and productivity.