



Contextualization of Learning Resources in Africa

[The Case of Sudan]

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**Contextualization of Learning Resources in Africa:
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SUMMARY

This report is a synthesis of the survey outcome that was intended to appraise the individual and institutional aptitude to develop and use of contextualized learning resources in agricultural and natural resources management (NRM) institutions in the Sudan. Moreover, it assesses the performance of former students as a way of shaping the quality of training that currently exist in the country.

Sudan is facing unique challenges in restoring and sustaining its renewable natural resources, agricultural outputs and its environment. These challenges have arisen largely due to serious degradation in the natural resources base and the environment due to irrational land use pattern and lack of extension. In undertaking the problem for the short, the medium and for the long term, Sudan's Agricultural and Natural Resources Management (NRM) institutes must bring into being competent graduates who would-be the future officers and managers that serve the community, safeguard natural resources and sustain the environment. Such a graduate must be equipped with the requested and contextualized technical knowledge and skills that enable him to be trusted as the ultimate panacea in solving the problem.

The survey was covered most of the representative spectrum of the stakeholder in the field of agriculture and Natural Resources Management. The spectrum included some universities, Agricultural Research Cooperation (ARC), public, private and some non-governmental organizations. Those who are currently students were captured as medium Diploma, Bachelor or postgraduate students, while former students were captured as employees or employers and heads of institutions.

The results indicate that learning institutions are short of finances and pertinent policies that facilitate institutional development of contextualized learning materials in agriculture and NRM. The stakeholders are not equipped with the necessary skills and access to information needed to develop these materials is meager. This may impair the process of having graduates with competent background.

The situation substantiates urgent curricula revision considering the occupational profile of different actors. In addition to have a give-and-take relationship among learning institutions (ex. Universities) as a source of knowledge generation, research institutes as a source of knowledge test, Ministry of agriculture as a source knowledge broadcast and liaise and finally farmers not as just a substrate but as indigenous Knowledge reservoir. Such a revision and relationship, if established, will be the key input for developing contextualized learning resources that addressing the challenges in agriculture and NRM training systems in the country.

VENUE

The present study is conducted in Sudan (Fig. 1) and targeting some of institutions in the fields of Agriculture, Forestry and Natural resources management together with the stakeholders in the targeted fields. Historically Sudan was an Anglo-Egyptian country and geographically it occupies the coastal area of the Red Sea between Egypt and Eritrea and neighboring 9 countries including the fore mentioned countries. Geopolitically Sudan is considered as a bridge between the Arabic culture and the African one.

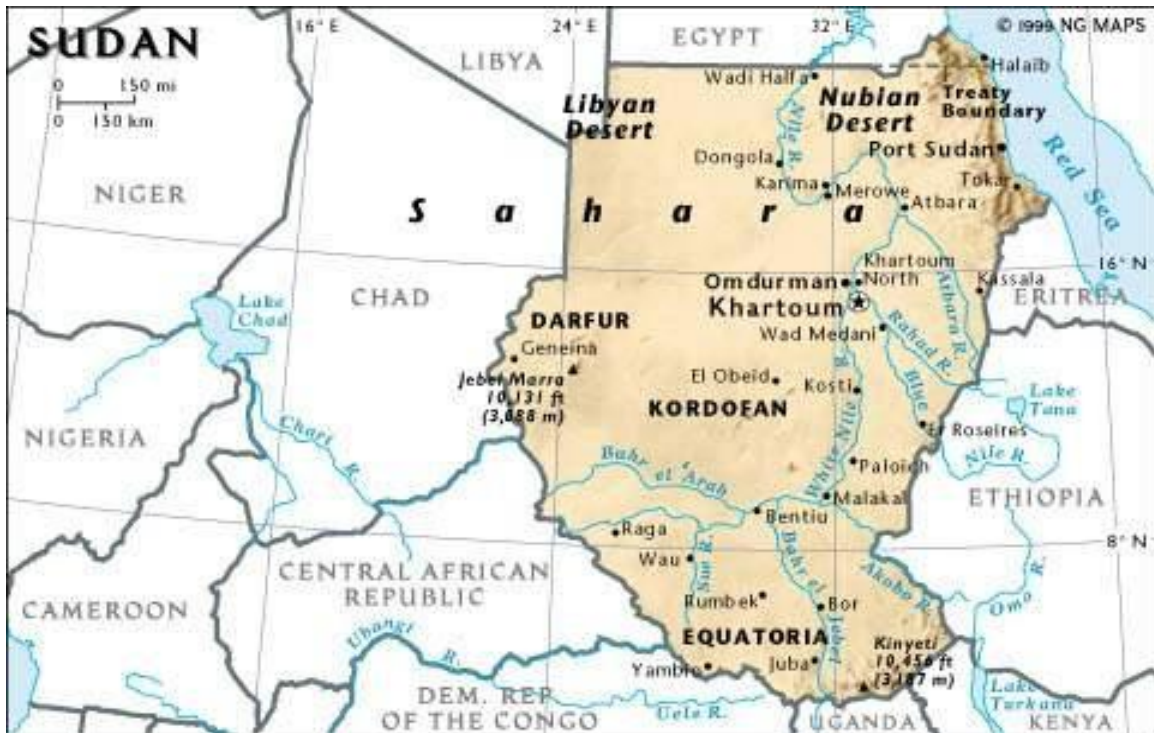


Figure 1. Map of the Sudan that reflected the unique geo-political position in east Africa

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and rationale

Within the framework of the Association of African Universities (AAU) programmes and in the aptitude building initiative entitled: *Mobilizing Regional Capacity Initiative (MRCI)* and in an endeavor to support African higher education institutes to catch-up with sustainable

development to, meet the Millennium Goals for development and poverty eradication in Africa, The African Network for Agriculture, Agro-forestry and Natural Resources Education (ANAFE) planned to identify and to pinpoint challenges in Improving the availability and relevance of agricultural learning resources. ANAFE with financial support from the Association of African Universities (AAU) decide to address some important aspects of training in agriculture, natural resource management in tertiary education in some selected countries in sub-Saharan Africa (viz: Benin, Rwanda and Mali as Francophone, Kenya, Malawi and Tanzania as Anglophone system and Ethiopia and Sudan as a unique systems of education).

Sudan, in early nineties of the last century, experienced unmatched horizontal expansion in higher education generally and in tertiary agricultural education particularly. Based on this expansion many new universities were inaugurated to absorbed thousands of student that supposed to be send to have their studies in Egypt, east European countries, the ex-Soviet Union and elsewhere in the world. Moreover, most if not all of poly techniques and colleges that award diploma were promoted to university status in step of liquidation of this type of training.

Therefore, the study could not have been undertaken at a more apt time as the tertiary education in the country is at present in front of unprecedented challenges in sustaining standard and quality of graduates that contribute to the development of sound agriculture, natural resources and environment. Therefore, contextualization of learning resources will be the ultimate magic potion or the panacea to settle the foregoing challenges.

1.2 Objectives of the study

The current study is, generally, aimed at appraising and assessing factors that obstruct human and institutional capacities for knowledge and learning materials contextualization the in country. However, study is specifically designed to come within reach of an approach that will aid in achieving the following objectives:

- 1.2.1 Identification of weaknesses, needs, opportunities, challenges and strengths of contextualizing agricultural learning resources in tertiary educational system in the domains of agriculture and natural resources management.
- 1.2.2 Dissection and evaluation of the existing situation by interviewing different stakeholders in the target field for integration of contextualized learning in the curricula.
- 1.2.3 Estimation of the degree of amalgamation of ICT and E-learning materials in learning process.
- 1.2.4 Understanding of policies and strategies to be used in addressing the challenges

1.3 Expected outputs

The following is expected to be achieved as an output from this study:

- 1.3.1 The degree to which the staffs in tertiary education use contextualized materials in their lectures and presentations will be understood.
- 1.3.2 The level to which staff and students in these use ICT and e-Learning facilities to enrich the learning know-how.
- 1.3.3 Requirement and support needed by staff in order to develop contextualized teaching materials.

3.3.4 Strengths, constraints opportunities and challenges, that facing staff in developing contextualized materials be explored and evaluated that aid in planning for future.

1.4 Methodology

Different key-informant questionnaires were designed to interview different stakeholders groups in the field of agriculture and natural resources management (*vise-a-vise*: employers, employees, heads of institutions, lecturers and students). These groups are detailed as following:

- 1.4.1 Students (Under-, and postgraduates) registered in faculties of agriculture, forestry and natural resources
- 1.4.2 Lecturers/tutors in faculties of agriculture, forestry and natural resources
- 1.4.3 Heads of institutions that train in agricultural and NRM. These included departmental (universities) and section heads (middle level colleges).
- 1.4.4 Employers (in government departments, companies and organizations Employees (in government and private sectors.
- 1.4.5 Farmers and farmer Community Base Organizations (CBOs).

In order to collect the required information, data from primary sources and secondary ones on learning experiences, training resources, development oriented policies and use of contextualized teaching and learning materials were use

CHAPTER TWO: CURRENT STATUS OF TERTIARY EDUCATION IN AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

2.1 Synopsis of Sudan profile

Total population around 32 millions (at the year 2001), annual growth rate is 2.6%, overall women outnumber men, 16% of the population are under the age of 5 years , 45% are under 15 years and 4% are over 60 years. Population density is 12 persons per square kilometer. Sudan is distinguished as multi-cultural and multi-lingual and multi-ethnic country (Around 20 major ethnic groups with some 600 sub-groups). However, official language is Arabic, spoken by about 60% of the population. Islam is the religion of more than 60% of the population, Christianity by 15%; the remaining 25% are animist. It is anticipated that around 90% are living below the poverty line. Sudan ranks 138 out of 175 as far as Human Development Index is concerned (WFP, 2004).

In the mid-1970s, there were four universities, eleven colleges, and twenty-three institutes in the country. The universities were located in the big cities, and all of the institutions of higher education were in the Northern states. Colleges were specialized degree-granting bodies. Institutes granted diplomas and certificates for periods of specialized study shorter than those commonly demanded at universities and colleges. These post-secondary institutions and universities had provided Sudan with a substantial number of well-educated persons in some fields but left it short of technical personnel and specialists in sciences relevant to the country's largely rural character.

In 1980 two new universities had opened, one is Juba university in south Sudan, while the other is Gezira university at Wad Medani in central Sudan. In 1981 there were some endeavors of opening a university in Darfur, which was almost as underprivileged of

educational facilities as the south. In 1990s Sudan experienced the so called Revolution in higher education where some institutes had been upgraded to colleges and a number of new universities had declared.

The University of Khartoum, previously- Gordon Memorial College- was the oldest university, established in 1956. In 1990 it enrolled about 12,000 students. University of Cairo (Khartoum branch) with 13,000 students is larger than the former university but of less reputation. The size of the latter and conceivably its lack of prestige reflected the fact that many if not most of its students worked to support themselves and attended evening classes. In Islamic University of Omdurman is smaller than the aforementioned universities and specialized in theological studies.

The University of Juba, inaugurated in 1977, celebrated the graduation of its first batch in 1981. It was intended to make available education for development and for the civil service for southern Sudan, although it was open to students from the whole country. Gezira College of Agriculture and Natural Resources was also intended to serve the country as a whole, but its focus was steady with its location in the most earth-shattering agricultural area in the country.

Omdurman Ahlia University was established by academics, professionals, and businesspeople in 1982 upon the hundredth anniversary of the founding of the city of Omdurman and was projected to meet the ever-increasing demand for training at higher education. The university was job oriented, private and almost self-financing institute. Its official language of instruction is English and oriented to occupational training relevant to the needs the country (Library of Congress 1991, 2004).

However, the most striking in the development of higher education in the Sudan is period since 1990 onward where several universities were inaugurated to cover all the 25 states of the Country. Some states received more than one university. This development comes after the advent of revolution in higher education.

2.2 General demographic information

Results presented in Figure (2) below show Employees categorization by gender and age for the respondents. Majority of the respondents belong to the 21-25 age range, 60% and 80% go to females and males, respectively. The 40 and above year olds comes next which comprises 32% of the total respondents. The lowest percent goes to 26-30 year olds which only comprises 10% of the total sample population. Out of the respondents surveyed, 65% are males while 35% are females which means majority of the total sample population are males. It is evident that, female employees started to gear-up with male in especially for recent generations (i.e. for age categories ≤ 20 -30 years old). While, males are dominating the sector females for age groups ≥ 30 years old. This is reflecting the fact that female/male ratios are increased at increasing rates in favor of females in recent years.

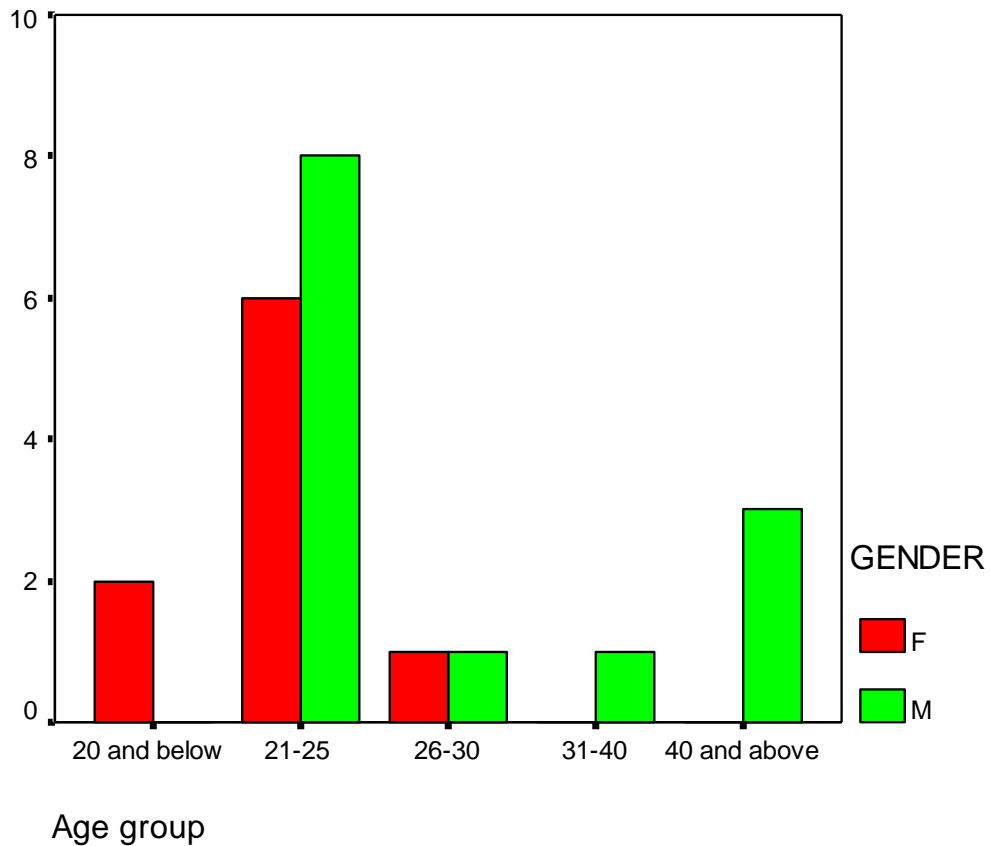


Fig. 2: Employees categorization by gender and age

2.3 Extent to which lecturers are developing and using contextualized Learning materials

Table 1, underneath is summing-up the perception of students, based on, the extent that lecturers' use contextualized teaching materials. The respondents' rating for each perception, where the scale of 5 means strongly agrees while the scale 1 refers to strongly disagree. The results designate a very narrow range from the total of scores (20 - 22), reflecting that all the enumerated aspects are approximately in the same way important and should be integrated into teaching

lessons. The results also designating that the level of using contextualized materials is low among the lecturers as students' are giving a high rate in their evaluation. As illustrated in table 1. , among the options for which there was the strongest agreement in working with communities which stands at number one. In this respect, majority (80%) of the total respondents strongly agree that lecturers require students to work with communities followed by 67% and 64% for improvement on demonstration plots/units, and inviting guest lecturers from outside the More than half (55%) of the total respondents strongly agree that the lecturers require students to do group presentations, and 50% are strongly agree that the lecturers require students to carry out case studies and take students to field trips.

Slightly less than half (41%) of the respondents strongly agree that the improvement on laboratory being developed by the lecturers as a contextualized learning materials.

Table 1. The perception of Sudanese students with regard to the extent to which lecturers use contextualized materials

		RATING					Total
		1	2	3	4	5	
Perception	Consult and refer to the relevant country policies	2	5	2	8	5	22
	Give Lectures	0	6	2	7	6	21
	Improve on demonstration plots/units	1	0	2	4	14	21
	Improve on laboratory work	2	3	0	8	9	22
	Invite guest lecturers from outside the university	2	1	0	5	14	22
	Require students to carry out Case studies	1	1	0	9	11	22
	Require students to do group presentations	1	2	4	3	12	22
	Require students to do individual presentations	0	6	4	5	7	22
	Require students to work with communities	0	1	2	1	16	20
	Take students to field trips	0	2	1	8	11	22
Total		9	27	17	58	105	216

Key: 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree

2.4 Institutional capacity to develop contextualized learning Materials in agriculture and NRM

Table 2, clearly shows that a vast majority (71%) of the respondents are rating recognition for promotion rarely is developed by institutions of higher agricultural and NRM Education. More than half (57%) of the total respondents rating financial support for lecturers to attend conferences and workshops is rarely. Also, 50% of the total respondents said payment for journal publications and prize awards are rarely come to the capacity of higher agricultural institutions and NRM Education as contextualized learning materials. A very narrow range (9-10) is given for totals of different items of the support needed to develop contextualized learning (table 2).

Table 2. Support required to enhance capacity of institutions of higher agricultural and NRM to develop contextualized learning materials

Count		RATING					Total
		1	2	3	4	5	
Support needed	Develop linkages with researchers in national and international research organizations.	0	0	0	1	9	10
	Formation of writing teams	0	1	1	1	6	9
	Get support from editors	0	0	1	1	7	9
	Internet connection	3	0	0	1	5	9
	My employer to give incentives	1	0	1	1	7	10
	My work load to be reduced	1	3	1	0	4	9
	Provision of finances for publishing.	0	0	0	2	8	10
	Training on writing skills	1	2	3	1	2	9
Total	6	6	7	8	48	75	

Key: 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree

2.5 Extent of usage of ICT and e-Learning resources by lecturers and students

Utilization of computers for a variety of activities was used to assess the extent to which both lecturers and their students were make use of ICT for both teaching and learning (i.e. As e-learning resources). In this study, Figures 3a & 3b below illustrates the frequency and reason for computer usage among lecturers. Results presented in Figure3a is showing that 90% of the interviewees using computer on a daily basis with the rest 10% using it once a week. The most important reasons given for the use of computers were for word processing and for presentation (19.6%) followed intimately by using computer for data base (17.6%) and for statistical analysis (13.7%). The aforementioned reasons make a record 70.6 % of the total interviewees.

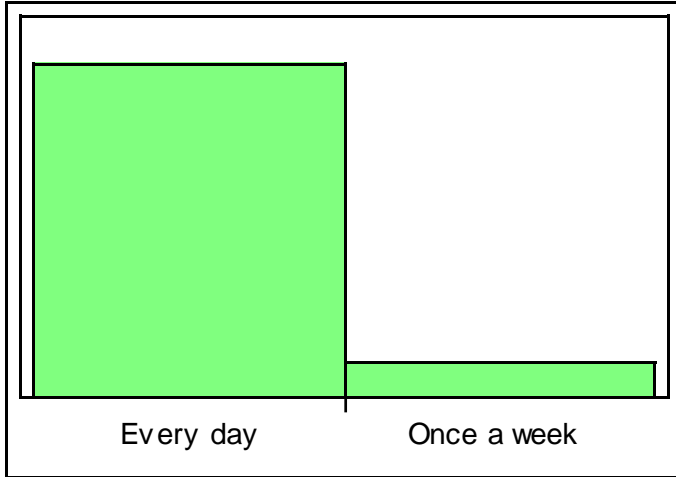


Fig 3a: Frequency of computer usage by lecturers

Level	Count	Prob
Every day	9	0.90000
Once a week	1	0.10000
Total	10	1.00000

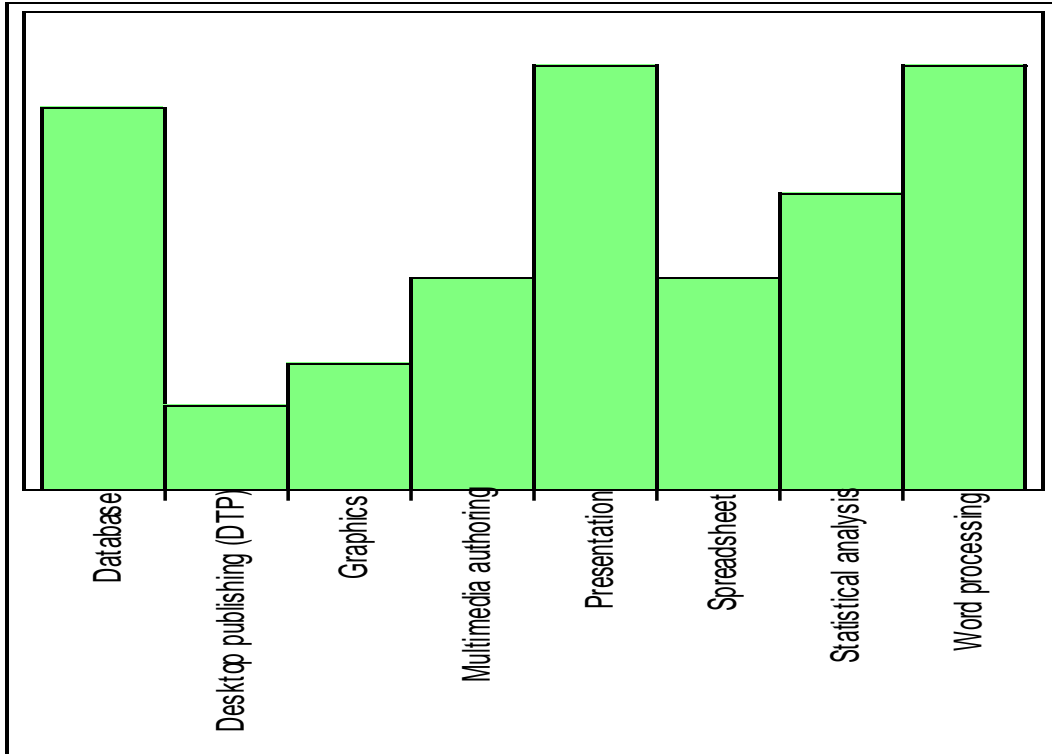


Figure 3b: Reasons for computer usage by lecturers

Level	Count	Prob
Database	9	0.17647
Desktop publishing (DTP)	2	0.03922
Graphics	3	0.05882
Multimedia authoring	5	0.09804
Presentation	10	0.19608
Spreadsheet	5	0.09804
Statistical analysis	7	0.13725
Word processing	10	0.19608
Total	51	1.00000

2.6 Current policies and practices that pave the way for contextualized agricultural and NRM education

Rating given by respondents for the variety of incentives, as itemized in the questionnaire, are shown in table 3 below. With the exception of provision of ICT facilities and equipments which scores in terms of total counts at 4, the range of total scores for the rest of incentives is very thin, 6-7. Slightly less than half of interviewees (43.5 % 27/62) rated the incentives packages as rarely offered. While, (29% 18/62) and (14.5% 9/62) were rated for by those who often and very often receives incentives in total respectively. Those who never received incentives scoring a total around, 11% 7/62.

Table 3: Incentives needed to enhance capacity of institutions in higher agricultural and NRM to develop contextualized learning materials

		RATING					Total
		always	never	often	rarely	very often	
Incentives	Financial support for lecturers to attend conferences and workshops	0	0	1	4	2	7
	Financial support for material production	1	2	0	3	1	7
	Payment for journal publications	0	1	2	3	0	6
	Payment for materials developed	0	0	2	2	2	6
	Prize awards	0	0	1	3	2	6
	Provision of ICT facilities and equipments	0	0	2	1	1	4
	Recognition for promotion	0	0	1	5	1	7
	Sharing of income from sold materials	0	1	3	2	0	6
	Short term training on material development	0	0	4	3	0	7
	Support for sabbatical leave	0	3	2	1	0	6
Total		1	7	18	27	9	62

Key: 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree

2.7 Farmers' evaluation of the present agricultural and NRM training practices

Results presented in Table 4 indicated that the slightly more than half of respondents (56.06%, 37/66) disagreed with the questions given to them. However, their insight on the graduates in the realm of agriculture and NRM was that 87.5%, 7/8 is reflecting that graduates are able to communicate with farmers and respecting their traditional knowledge. While, 75%, 6/8, of farmers disagreed that the graduates are not hand-on. However, 50% 4/8 see that recommendations given to them by graduates are applicable, they concentrated on their work (62.5%, 5/8), do not bring any new technology/bring new technologies (37.5%, 3/8), have the ability to solve the problems/don't have ability to solve problems (50%, 4/8). Finally, 75%, 6/8, of farmers agreed that agriculture officers are not available in the field.

**Table 4: Perception of farmers toward the graduates of
Agriculture and NRM institutes**

		RATING			Total
		Agree	Disagree	Not sure	
Perception	They are not able to communicate with farmers	1	7	0	8
	They are not available.	6	1	1	8
	They are not competent	1	0	0	1
	They are not hands on	1	6	1	8
	They disrespect our traditional knowledge.	1	7	0	8
	They don't bring any new technology	3	3	2	8
	They don't concentrate on their work.	1	5	2	8
	They don't help in solving our problems	4	4	0	8
	They make no demonstration/ no pilot farms	1	0	0	1
	What they recommend is not practicable	3	4	1	8
Total		22	37	7	66

CHAPTER THREE: CONSTRAINTS, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPING CONTEXTUALIZED LEARNING MATERIALS

Table 5 gives summary for the constraints, challenges and opportunities for developing contextualized learning materials by lecturers. It reveals that 80% and 89% of the lecturers are strongly agree with lack of finance to write and publish, and lack of incentives, respectively.

Majority (78%) of the lecturers are strongly disagreeing with not interested in writing, in addition 56% of them are strongly disagreeing with the lack of writing skills.

Table 5: Challenges faced in developing contextualized learning materials by lecturers

		RATING					Total
		1	2	3	4	5	
Challenges	Difficulties in forming working teams	1	3	3	1	1	9
	I am not interested in writing	7	1	0	1	0	9
	Lack of finances to write and publish	0	0	0	2	8	10
	Lack of incentives	0	1	0	0	8	9
	Lack of mentors and advisors	2	3	2	0	1	8
	Lack of relevant data/information to write on	4	1	0	2	2	9
	Lack of writing skills	5	1	2	1	0	9
	There are many books for the course	2	6	2	0	0	10
	Too much work load	2	2	3	0	2	9
Total		23	18	12	7	22	82

Key: 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree

CHAPTER FOUR: STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND NRM TRAINING

4.1 STRATEGIES

Various strategies were indicated in the study with results shown in Tables 6. The objective was to recognize those that had direct request and possibility to lecturers. Ones that received common accord were:

1-strategies of budget support (100%)

2-Improve working conditions for staff (67%) is strongly being agreed by the heads of Sudan institutions.

On other hand, half (50%) of the heads of institution are strongly disagree with hiring more teaching and support staff strategy.

On the opposite end of the spectrum is the low rating accorded collaboration with national research organization, yet this creates opportunities to share scarce resources within financially constrained government institutions.

Table 6: Strategies enhancing the development of contextualized learning materials by heads of institutions

		RATING					Total
		five	four	one	three	two	
STRATEGY	Budget support	4	0	0	0	0	4
	Establishing publishing houses	2	0	3	1	0	6
	Hiring more teaching and support staff	0	0	3	2	1	6
	Improve working conditions for staff	4	0	0	0	2	6
	Improved remuneration	1	0	0	0	4	5
	Training of lecturers	0	1	2	0	2	5
Total		11	1	8	3	9	32

Key: 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree

4.2 Prospects for contextualization of learning materials

In view of the fact that data presented in the current study is meagerly reflecting the used of contextualized materials and methods in some fields of agriculture and NRM training , the following points can be considered as tools that pave the way forward for more contextualization in learning resources:

- Launching of a comprehensive and an area wide survey considering the different eco-social zone of the country.
- Exchange of staff among education institutions within the country and between Sudan and other African countries in the region that have the similar ecological niche.
- Organization of field days that bring together different stakeholders in the field of Agriculture and NRM.
- Periodical revision of curricula by academicians and other actors to mate the occupational profile needed by different stakeholder. This could be achieved through organization of workshops, symposia and round table discussions that pinpoint the areas that need more

CHAPTER FIVE: Discussion and CONCLUSIONS

Analysis of the actual situation in teaching and learning process is very important for better understanding of value of learning. It clearly expresses the importance of the logical order of input/process/output in the training institutions. To appraise the contemporary education practices in the teaching institutions, students at present registered in these institutions as beneficiary and the direct stakeholders in the teaching and learning operation,

are no doubt the best source for evaluation for the supposed training. Their consideration in assessment is therefore; indispensable in comprehending areas that need more improvement to obtain the needed skills which enable them to perform satisfactorily at their working career. Generally, the study concluded that the level of using contextualized materials is low among the lecturers as students' are giving a high rate in their evaluation. It may be due to the fact that supportive policies that pave the way for development of contextualized teaching materials among staff members in the concerned institutions are very meager and currently not encouraging for contextualization enhancement. From the study, one can extrapolated that, while the incentives listed might not have been far-reaching; they capture the general reaction of what was considered essential incentives by the directors of institutions.

The perception of farmers is of paramount important and it may sometimes encompass the process of contextualization of learning resources through the indigenous knowledge which accumulated through times. The study reflecting that there are no problems with the former students as they easily handle different issues with farmers. The study confirmed that working with communities offers the best prospect for students to acquire much needed applied field experience considering indigenous knowledge.

Issues of the support needed that highly rated by respondents and strongly agreed upon as indicators for the capacity that should be exist in institutions to develop contextualizes materials, in descending manner, are: development of linkages with research bodies at national and international levels followed by provision of funds for publication and getting support from editors/ receiving

incentives from employers. Budget support is fully agreed upon as strategy for developing contextualized learning materials beside improvement of working condition that highly rated.

Generally, one can deduce that there are some incentives are offered but need to be boost-up and sustain for improvement and development of learning contextualization. The results imply that provision of ICT facilities and equipments is not a constraint. However, the study raises serious concern with regard to the contribution of graduate in the areas of technology transfer, and problem solving approach. In forthcoming future, curricula revision, staff exchange, arrangement among stakeholder and working with communities via field days are indispensable tools for contextualization.

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