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### **My Study Visit to Kenya, Africa**

## **REPORT OF EXPERIENCE**

As part of my second year of study at the National School for Agronomy and Food Engineering of Nancy in France, I had to have an experience abroad. My desire was to go and have an experience in an English-speaking African country, and I chose Kenya. My internship was at Rural Outreach Program (ROP), an NGO that was founded by Hon. Prof. Ruth Oniang'o, who is also the Secretary to the Board of Trustees. She gave me a warm and jovial welcome and ensured that my induction was smooth. ROP strives to help the rural communities in Kenya, by teaching farmers new technologies, appropriate farming approaches such as planting improved seed varieties and using relevant farming tools. My internship lasted 5 months, from April to August 2018.

8<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> April 2018: Preparation of my study

### **Arrival in Nairobi**

I landed in Kenya on Monday the 9<sup>th</sup> of April. It was already a first adventure, because I had told Professor that I would arrive at 6, so I called her to tell her I was at the airport. She asked me: "- In Nairobi or Charles de Gaulles? - In Nairobi, I responded. – Oh, I thought you would arrive at 6pm! ". I had not clarified where I would arrive at 6pm or 6am. They had prepared a placard to welcome me, but because of that mistake, I just found myself alone in the airport and I took a taxi. After arriving at the hostel, Michael Okumu and Polycarp, the driver, came to pick me and they took me to ROP's office. After numerous correspondences through email, I was finally meeting Professor. She asked me about my journey, and we discussed about my internship, what was expected of me, but also how I wanted to tour and discover Kenya and anything else I wanted to do. We agreed with Professor, that I would conduct a study about how farming is being done by small-scale farmers in Western Kenya (Butere, Lurambi, Sabatia, Vihiga, Emuhaya and Hamisi sub-counties), especially on maize production systems. My approach was to use a questionnaire to interview farmers. The goal of the study was to evaluate the benefits that the small-scale farmers can get from innovative agricultural practices. The practices that were studied were:

- Use of a drought-resistant maize varieties (TEGO)

- Crop rotation and intercropping
- Agroforestry
- Conservation agriculture
- Fertilization (either organic and mineral)

### Redaction of the questionnaire

I spent the following days mostly with Michael and Steve Andala, (who would become my teammate during the study), to redact the questionnaire. We spent three days to redact a first version of the questionnaire for my study. We also received the help of Njeri Karanu and Sylvester Aura, who are used to that kind of interaction with the farmers, as Steve. As we were trying to redact the most adapted questionnaire for farmers, I began to realize how interesting my experience in Western Kenya would be, by giving me a chance to analyse agriculture from a totally different perspective from what I knew in France. Mr. Michael was very helpful in getting me settled in Kenya, and getting the basic utilities, besides creating humour by telling me Kenyan jokes.

### Travelling to Western Kenya

Five days after my arrival in Nairobi, Steve and I travelled by bus to Western Kenya. This was a good opportunity for me to get a first view of the beautiful landscapes of Kenya, but also to see how people live in the rural areas. It was also during that journey that I began learning about Kenyan politics with Steve. I lived in Western Kenya, at Professor's brother's home. I have been totally integrated as a member of the family, and I spent three wonderful months with them. I spoke about football with Lumumba, Professor's brother, I was taught how to cook ugali with Ruth, his wife, and Melsah, their niece, and I played with Liam, their grand-son.



Professor Ruth's Family and me (left to right: Lumumba, Ruth, Musani, Liam, Charly, Melsah)

I quickly met the other members of ROP staff, like Martin Sechele who is based at the Matioli office, s me. I used the first days in Western Kenya to test the questionnaire with some farmers in the neighbourhood. Testing was very useful in adapting the questionnaire and reformulating the questions that were not understood well by the farmers, and to reduce the time of the questionnaire to 30 minutes. We finally got the final version of it around the 20<sup>th</sup> of April and then we were ready to start meeting farmers.

14<sup>th</sup> April to 8<sup>th</sup> July 2018: data collection

### **Meeting of the farmers**

The three following months were dedicated to the meeting with the farmers and the collection of the data. The farmers that we interviewed had to meet two criteria: to produce maize and to be part of a farmer group that is working with ROP. The NGO is working only with small-scale farmers that first produce food to eat, instead of sell. Maize is a Kenyan staple food, so most of these farmers are planting maize. These farmers are all organized in groups that are registered to the government.



A young group we met and lent some improved tools





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Our technique with Steve consisted of calling one of the member of the farmer group, one or two days before the meeting, and asking him to gather at least four of the members in the house of one of them. We would travel by motorbike to meet them. We met between two and three groups per day. These meetings were all very interesting. At the beginning, it was a bit complicated, because some farmers, and in some groups most of them, were not able to speak English. Thankfully, Steve was there to translate, but when I had to ask Steve to translate every question and the answers, it was not very interesting. I was not able to go further in the discussion, and the farmers and I were getting bored before the end of the questionnaire. It was also complicated to understand the unit of measurement for produce used by farmers, for example, they measure quantities of beans in *goro-goro*, which is a 2 kg container. Finally, I adapted myself, I learned some words in Luyha, the farmer's mother tongue, and it made them laugh and be interested. I was very happy to manage to interact with old and young African men and ladies, I would have never imagined discussing with these people one day. All these meetings allowed me to discover and understand the Luhya culture and farming. When we had enough time, the farmers would make us visit their farms.

### **Participation of other mission**

Sometimes, after completing that first questionnaire, we would also fill the improved farming tools research questionnaire. Some of the farmers we would visit are also testing improved farming tools. This is a research that ROP is undertaking with Michigan State University in USA.



Martin Sechele presenting the improved tools during the field day at ATC Bukura

### **Presentation on French agriculture**

The meetings with farmers were very interesting. But sometimes, I felt that I was receiving a lot from them through their answers, and not to giving anything in return. I decided to create a presentation of French agriculture, that I could show to the farmers on my computer, so that it becomes an exchange. It was hard to select the information that I wanted to present. I wanted to show them a true vision of farming in France, with the challenges and the problems we are facing, but also something that would be interesting, adapted, and can easily be understood. After collecting the data I needed, I would show them the presentation using my computer. Sometimes it led us to very interesting discussions of the future of farming in Kenya, and sometimes it allowed farmers to get 20 minutes of sleep.

### **Other activities**

I consider working with Steve a good opportunity for me. Steve is very sociable and knows many people around that area. He brought me to many meetings where we were attending as ROP staff, or meeting for other occupation. As an example, we went to the preparatory meeting for the Bukura Field Day. It was also a very nice experience of my stay in Western Kenya, as it was the occasion to visit the Agricultural Training College (ATC) of Bukura, where the field day took place, to meet some professional stakeholders of farming in Kenya, like representatives of Mavuno Fertilizer, Kenya Seeds, Syngenta, or USAID, and to discover how such an event is organized in Kenya. I also assisted in the field day. Approximately two thousand farmers came. I went to every stand to discuss and discover more precisely the field work of each organisation. I also had the chance to assist in the Kakamega Agricultural Show, which was the same kind of event as the Field Day.



**Steve and me in front of the Lake Victoria**

In May I participated in a media event organized by ROP at Lunza primary school. It was a presentation to the media of the work ROP is doing with students in the school around farming and nutrition education. ROP works in partnership with willing schools to create a student club called 4K club. The members of that club are then taught how to do farming, especially how to plant African Indigenous Leafy Vegetables, that are very nutritious and affordable.



8<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> July 2018: work at the office in Mbale, Vihiga

### Preparation of the Farmers' Field Day/Trade fair



Dorisy Anjawa supervising the ROP's stand a the field day

I spend two weeks at the beginning of July in the office of Mbale in the county of Vihiga. I was there with Doris Anjawa, who is the field coordinator of ROP, and other members of the staff. I used the time in the office to enter the data from my questionnaires to my computer. The staff and especially Doris, were very busy at that moment because they were preparing a field day that took place on the 20th of July. This field day was focusing on value-addition. Approximately thirty exhibitors were there, and most of them were farmer groups. These groups presented value-added products they make from their farm produce. Some of them were cooking *mandazi* or *chapati* enriched with soybean flour, some were preparing banana and avocado juice, and others were presenting banana leaf crafts. I have been taught there how to prepare soya *mandazi*, with Roselyda Awinja (Mama Soya), the specialist for soya value-addition in Mbale office.

During that period, I slept at Doris' home. Once more, I was welcomed as a member of the family. They even celebrated my birthday, by buying a cake for me. It was very nice for me to celebrate my birthday in Kenya.

### Meeting with Dr. Woyengo of Kenya Agricultural and Livestock Research Organization (KALRO)

I also enjoyed being in Mbale and having some free time to visit KALRO in Kakamega, which is the national research organization for agriculture in Kenya. I went there first with Doris, and we had been given the number of Dr. Woyengo, who is the coordinator for maize research in Western Kenya. After calling him for an appointment, I met him the following week, in his office in KALRO Kakamega. I presented him my research and

I asked him about some documents concerning farming in Western Kenya, and especially maize crop. He seemed to be very interested with my work and I promised to send him my report when it would be completed. One more time, having the opportunity to meet such people was a great help for my study, as it confirmed the choices I would have made, and the interest of my work.

21<sup>st</sup> July to 19<sup>th</sup> August: data analyses

### **Statistical analyses of the data in the office in Nairobi**

I travelled back to Nairobi on the 21<sup>st</sup> of July, with Polycarp and Njeri. It was the time to say goodbye to all the people I met in Western Kenya, who welcomed me as a member of the community and even of the family, for the ones I lived with. I felt a bit worried about having 3 months in that place when I arrived, but I was finally sad to leave it. Then I needed to adapt again to Nairobi now. The climate was colder, the people in the street are not as friendly, but I met Professor and the staff of the Nairobi office.

Finally, that period has been also very interesting for me. I finished my work and I received a lot of help from Njeri Karanu and Sylvester Aura. Everybody in the office has been very nice. They celebrated my birthday and my departure, with presents and good food from Kenya.



Polycarp Kahyeka, Aura Sylvester, Ruben Omary and me cutting our birthday cake



I left Kenya on August, the 19<sup>th</sup>. I was a bit sad to leave that beautiful country with all that very nice people I met. One more time, I want to thank Professor Ruth Oniang'o and all the members of ROP for that wonderful experience. I will never forget Kenya.

Abari Gani, Oriomno, Merci beaucoup



Professor Ruth and me, during our last meeting