

SAHEL MASTERS TRAINING PROGRAM IN AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS

(AID/afr-C-1267)

Annual Report for 1978

by

Lester Manderscheid  
Director

Tom Zalla  
Coordinator

Department of Agricultural Economics  
Michigan State University  
East Lansing, Michigan

January 1979

- !

## Sahel Masters Training Program in Agricultural Economics

(AID/afr-C-1267)

The Sahel Masters Training Program is now an integral and functioning component of the Department of Agricultural Economics. Some of the initial problems have been solved. There is a significant enrollment. Students are progressing toward degrees. Special assistance is being provided. Next year will see the first students completing the program and, hopefully, the further amelioration of some remaining problems.

The following sections will focus on the students, the academic program, English language training, admissions problems, and recruiting problems.

### Students

During the second full year of the project five new students were admitted directly into the M.S. program. Two other students were admitted into the Bachelor's program in Food Systems Economics and Management, one of two agricultural economics undergraduate majors. Of the five new graduate students, two were Senegalese, bringing the total number of Senegalese admitted into the program to four. The other three were Malian, the first students from that country to be admitted. One student from Niger and one student from Mauritania were admitted into the undergraduate program as part of a combined three year Bachelor's/M.S. degree program. Both of these students had two to three years of prior university level course work. They were accepted into the program because of the unavailability from their respective countries of candidates

holding the equivalent of a Bachelor's degree. A Bachelor's degree or its equivalent is required for admission to graduate studies at M.S.U.

Most of the students are doing well, though academic difficulties during the first term at M.S.U. seem to be common. Students who have taken a full six months of English language training prior to beginning academic studies do better than those who try to cut short language training. Only two of the ten students now in the program were able to begin academic studies after only three months of English, but none have required more than six months. Students also have difficulty adapting to the American system of presenting course material and, more importantly, the American system of examinations. Students generally do less well in their exams than they do in their non-examination course work, such as homework problems and papers. Both the analytical approach to exams and the limited time for taking them pose particular difficulty for Sahelian students. In general, we are finding greater success by encouraging students to take only two courses during their first "full term" of academic study. Apart from these essentially transitional problems, however, most of the students are progressing nicely.

#### English Language Training

Thus far, USAID and USDA placement officers have been relying on ALIGU at Georgetown, the Economics Institute at Boulder, and the English Language Center at M.S.U. for English training. The original contract called for M.S.U. to collaborate with either Howard University or Atlanta University Center in establishing an intensive language program for students coming into the program. After neither school presented USAID with an acceptable proposal on how they proposed to do this,

the contract was amended this year to read, ". . . the English language training center at Virginia State University and/or Howard University will be considered for the next contingent of Sahelian students expected in September, 1978, and thereafter."

Subsequent to receiving this amendment in August, we made telephone contact with both institutions. We discovered that intensive English programs planned for each had been postponed until January of 1979 at the earliest. In November we followed up the earlier telephone contacts with a letter to each institution asking about the status of their program. As of the end of 1978, we had not yet received a reply to either of our inquiries. As soon as one of these programs is operating we intend to encourage USAID and USDA placement officers to send students destined for our program there for language training. We do not expect to have a major problem in enticing them to comply with our request given Africa Bureau's intent that this be done.

#### Admission Problems

We are making substantial progress in getting the Admissions Office to understand the unusual academic background of some Sahelian candidates for the program. An initial proposal to give general credit for course material taken in what the University considers technical rather than formal university level studies was accepted by the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources and is now being finalized with other colleges and departments concerned.

We are also seeking approval to admit students into the graduate program on the basis of certification by the department that a student

has the equivalent of a Bachelor's degree, though he/she may not hold such an equivalent degree. Under this proposal, which we anticipate will be accepted, students having two to three years of post-secondary school training in technical agriculture and related areas can be admitted to graduate school after completing a defined program of studies in agricultural economics, mathematics, statistics, and economics with a GPA of 3.0 or better ( $A = 4.0$ ). The program of studies we have proposed would give them a background in agricultural economics similar to an undergraduate major but would not provide the liberal education normally required for a B.S. from a United States university. After completing this supplemental program of studies, students could expect to complete their M.S. degree in fifteen months rather than the eighteen months it normally takes. Coupled with the undergraduate work we would require under this option, students taking it would face academic programs of 24 to 27 months as compared to the 18 to 21 months typical of the average degree-holding entrant into the program. This flexibility should greatly expand the pool of potential candidates, especially in such countries as Chad, Niger, and the Gambia.

#### Academic Program

Turning to the academic program itself, we offered for the first time during Winter 1978 one of the courses designed especially for the Sahel Masters Program. The course is titled, "Terms, Concepts, and Fields of Agricultural Economics." The course had two objectives:

- 1) to familiarize students with the terms and technical subject matter of agricultural economics as a discipline, and 2) to improve the students'

ability to read, write, and speak English. The course carried three credit hours and met for three class hours per week.

In general, the results of the course were below expectations. Two of the three students enrolled had only four months of English and were enrolled concurrently in two English courses. The net result was that their inability to express themselves clearly and concisely delayed greatly the progress of the course with respect to covering the necessary technical subject matter. In light of this experience and a subsequent realization that inadequate preparation for American examination procedures is a major cause of poor academic progress, both the objectives and class hours for the course have been expanded. How to prepare for and successfully take examinations has been added as a third objective of the course. Class hours have been expanded from three to six per week. This is necessary in order to insure the development of English language skills while presenting a reasonable technical content. Students will write five brief papers, take five exams, and present one seminar during the ten-week course. The revised course outline is attached as an appendix to this report.

In addition to the special tutorial assistance Sahelian students receive in the special course, a graduate assistant has been assisting those who need help editing papers which they must prepare for other courses. In general, we intend to provide this assistance only during the first year students are enrolled in the program. By the end of their first year, students should be able to write a coherent paper in English on their own. Tutorial efforts can then shift to the new

wave of students entering the program.

Admission and Recruiting Problems

Looking at recruiting efforts for the 1980 program, we are hoping for more geographical balance among students. Currently we have accepted one Nigerien with three and a half years of university level course work into the program and two Malians with B.S.-equivalent degrees. However, we have not yet received confirmation from the USAID mission in Mali that the two candidates we have accepted will indeed come to M.S.U. We are assured at least one candidate from Mauritania and another from the Gambia. We have not yet had a reply from recent correspondence to Chad, Senegal, Upper Volta, and Cape Verde. Given our contacts in Senegal, it would be most surprising if we do not get at least one nominee from that country. Both the candidates from the Gambia and Niger would be admitted as special undergraduate students while they complete three to nine months of preparatory course work prior to certification of Bachelor's equivalency for admission to graduate school. The other candidates should all have the equivalent of a Bachelor's degree. In general, we expect continuing problems in getting candidates from Upper Volta and Cape Verde. One candidate from Upper Volta was rejected because of near failing grades at the undergraduate level.

Compounding the problem of maintaining geographical balance while meeting our training goals is the fact that we do not control fellowships for students coming into the program. In some cases, candidates identified on our recruiting trips have been sent to other schools for agricultural

economics training. In cases where the USAID mission forgets to specify Michigan State University in the PIOP, we do not always succeed in convincing USDA or USAID placement officers to send a candidate's dossier to us for formal consideration.

Summary

We believe that we have made excellent progress in bringing the program to fruition and overcoming some of the many obstacles which hampered our first year's performance. The Sahelian students admitted into the program are proving to be an asset to the department in general and our graduate program in particular. We are looking toward 1979 as the year when our first graduates return to their countries. In the final analysis, it will be the judgement of their peers and professional associates that will provide the acid test of the ultimate success of the program.

BUDGET REPORT

African Development Program:  
Master's Training Program in Agricultural Economics  
for Students from the Sahel

Total Budget

<u>Line Items.</u>	<u>10/1/76- 9/30/77</u>	<u>10/1/77- 9/30/78</u>	<u>10/1/78- 9/30/79</u>	<u>10/1/79- 9/30/80</u>	<u>10/1/80- 9/30/81</u>	<u>10/1/81- 9/30/82</u>	<u>10/1/82- 9/30/83</u>	<u>Total 10/1/76- 9/30/83</u>
Salaries	\$ 3,290	\$ 9,500	\$20,370	\$27,650	\$29,310	\$31,050	\$20,070	\$141,350
Overhead	2,073	6,048	12,833	17,420	18,465	19,568	12,644	89,051
Fringe Benefits	756	1,268	2,469	3,882	4,116	4,098	2,925	19,514
Travel/Transportation	3,070	3,250	3,450	7,300	7,730	4,100	4,350	33,250
Other Direct Costs	235	1,270	1,350	1,430	1,510	1,610	1,700	9,105
Total	\$ 9,424	\$21,436	\$40,472	\$57,682	\$61,131	\$60,436	\$41,689	\$292,270

Total Expenditures

	<u>10/1/76- 9/30/77</u>	<u>10/1/77- 9/30/78</u>	<u>Total 10/1/76- 9/30/78</u>
Salaries	\$ 6,081.34	\$ 5,361.51	\$11,442.85
Overhead	4,035.46	3,140.78	7,176.24
Fringe Benefits	963.52	762.21	1,725.73
Travel/Transportation	3,950.27	3,468.33	7,418.60
Other Direct Costs	292.34	1,361.13	1,653.47
Total	\$15,322.93	\$14,093.96	\$29,416.89