

UoN Students Hail Field Course Program

Before attending a joint field course trip organized by the Centre for Sustainable Dryland Ecosystems and Societies (CSDES), Bernice Mereina Sainepo from Kajiado County lacked hands-on training in dryland ecosystem resource assessment. Like many of her classmates, she was not in a position to relate the lessons learnt in class to real issues on the ground.

“Most of us had no insight into the real environmental issues in the drylands of Kenya. Our level of interaction with pastoral communities was very poor,” She says.

Sainepo is a 3rd year student at University of Nairobi (UoN) pursuing a BSc. Management of Agro Ecosystems and Environment studies at the Department of Land Resources Management and Agricultural Technology (LARMAT). She was among six students who were competitively selected to join thirteen students from University of Michigan for a three week field study experience in August 2013. The field course was titled: “Conservation and Development in Cultural Landscape”. CSDES supported her application.

CSDES is a partnership between UoN and Colorado State University (CSU) that is funded by United States Agency for International Development (USAID) through Higher Education for Development (HED) initiative. The partnership aims to contribute to sustainable dryland ecosystems and improved livelihoods through innovative trans-disciplinary education, research, partnerships, policy dialogue and community outreach initiatives.

To achieve its mission, CSDES collaborates with other Universities to develop field courses that enable students from diverse academic backgrounds at UoN to: explore the intersections between conservation and development in drylands; familiarize students with research processes; receive hands on training in dryland resource management; and, create avenue for interaction with pastoral communities. A total of 38 students have benefitted from field course programs in the past two years.

Sainepo says that the field course gave her practical relevance to the theory she learnt in class and hands on experience on environmental issues. “I am able to relate very well to current happenings in my environment and able to think critically on real problems and solutions. It has given me a very deep insight on research techniques and how important it is to gaining information.”

Ms. Natasha Nailenya from TransMara County is also a 3rd year student at UoN and a beneficiary of the program. She is full of praise for the program. “The field course enabled me understand in depth the various research methodologies and approaches that assist in data collection. I have gained the skills to relate with people of different cultural backgrounds and understand their social construction.” She says.

Some of the areas where the field course trainings have taken place include UoN’s Kibwezi Field Station in Makueni, Mpala Research Station in Laikipia County, Samburu County, and Maasai Mara in Narok County.

