

Users Applaud the Role of AAAE Website: Results of an Online Survey

Introduction

The survey was conducted between May and June 2009 through an email and internet questionnaire. The objective of the survey was to collect views of AAAE members and other users on the performance, organization and role of the Association website, www.aaae-africa.org. A total of 249 respondents returned the questionnaire out of the 1250 contacted, representing a success rate of 22%. Members of AAAE who returned the survey forms comprised 48% while 52% participated as general users of the website. The responses were analyzed and improvements are being made to the website in order to enhance its role to members, students, farmers, policymakers and the larger scientific, business and development community.

Summary Results

Most users of the website reported making an average of 5 visits every month. About 94% of those contacted had visited the website, with 32% making over 4 visits per month. Based on the information users collect from the website, 78% expressed satisfaction with the quality and type of content disseminated. Users rank the website very highly (30%) while 20% expressed need to improve on the quality, type and frequency of information. It is very encouraging to note that 72% of the respondents had their information posted or linked from the website. Another 46% respondents would like to have their work posted or linked to the website. The detailed graphical analysis of the survey data is presented in Annex 2.

Most respondents (76%) suggested various improvements to the website in order for it to meet various expectations and needs of users (Annex 2). These recommendations will be implemented by the Secretariat and will cover:

- a. Inclusion of new topics in the content of information disseminated
- b. Developing tools to assist members and other users post and better access information through the website including subscriptions to scientific journals.
- c. Creating automatic feeds to members for new information posted on the website
- d. Links to information and publications on agricultural development
- e. Improving navigation and appearance of the website
- f. Regular dissemination of career development opportunities such as grants, jobs and fellowships
- g. Development of interactive forums such as blogs and discussion forums to enhance interaction among members

Additional topics suggested for greater coverage by the website

- Agricultural insurance
- Agricultural program implementation best practices and success stories
- Agro-processing/encourage this industry in Africa
- Appropriate technologies in agriculture

- Bio-fuel energy
- Business Subjects
- Capacity building women Agro-economists in Africa
- Export Opportunities for the small scale and semi processed agri-business
- Food security and soaring food prices
- Gender studies
- Global financial and economic crises
- Household food demand analysis
- Impact assessments of various agricultural technologies and practices
- Domestic and international trade
- Latest in agricultural marketing, transaction cost analysis
- Market situation analysis, surpluses, commodities and quality/specs information
- Marketing and Policy
- Poverty and equity
- Research results and research methodologies
- Rural development issues/role of agriculture in rural development
- Technology transfer for small and medium size agricultural organizations
- The climate change initiatives and studies
- Current research and projects of various organizations and departments
- Current policy debates and challenges of relevance to the field
- The state of the field of agricultural economics

Acknowledgement and Way Forward

The Secretariat appreciates the generous contributions and comments by respondents to the survey and will undertake to implement the suggested improvements in order to enhance the visibility of the Association, its members and their work to develop African agriculture. An update of the website improvements will be posted online and in the upcoming issues of *The Informer*.

About the website

www.aaae-africa.org is maintained by the AAAE Secretariat and disseminates information to members and the larger internet, research, development and business communities. It is updated regularly with new information contributed by members, various organizations and individuals. The site has been visited by over 77000 users for the last five years. The website announces new research, training and scholarship opportunities for members, upcoming conferences, publications, Journals and other online resources useful to members. The website disseminates the AAAE Newsletter (*The Informer*), AAAE journal, AfJARE and contact details of all its members. The proceedings of the Inaugural symposium 2004 and the AAAE Second International Conference 2007 have been disseminated through the website. The site is also assisting in registering new members.

Annex 1. Suggestions for improving the website and its role

Inclusion of new topics in the content of information disseminated

- Include more areas in business
- Showcase successful African entrepreneurs in agricultural sector
- Give room to agricultural and other development-related best practices
- Courses offered by institutions hosting Association members
- Developments in agro-industries and value addition in African produce.
- Provide information on sellers and buyers, distributors of agricultural inputs, products and services, market analyses, commodities specifications, among others.
- Highlight government policies on imports in relation to domestic production

Developing tools to assist members and other users post and better access information through the website

- Assist members and their departments/organizations develop pages within the AAAE website.
- Announcement of achievements of members, new registrations and research outputs
- Detailed profiles for members including photos, publications and research products
- Sharing of research results and emerging research methodologies by members
- Access to free and subscriber journals
- Increased coverage of content by African countries.
- Post guidelines and process on how to become a member
- Prominent highlighting of products and services of AAAE

Sharing updates with members

- A conference alert facility to inform members of upcoming conferences
- Frequently update the website
- Create automatic feeds to members for new information posted on the website and recent developments in agricultural economics and the sector itself
- Avail information downloads especially articles on agricultural economics

Links to information and publications on agricultural development

- Funding agencies for research and fellowships
- Association of African, Commonwealth and world Universities and libraries
- Agro-processors' websites.
- Working paper discussion series in some of the Universities
- Trade related organizations at the region and international level
- Agriculture sector and rural development organizations
- Publications of recent scientific works from members
- Cover work from non-university institutions and UN development agencies
- Cross-reference with regional and continental research and policy websites
- other agricultural economics societies in Africa and the rest of the world

Improving navigation and appearance of the website

- Present website versions of both French and English
- Improve on graphics and pictorial information to make website more attractive
- Develop additional AAE-related websites to enhance coverage and scope of the information disseminated online.
- Better presentation, navigation and regular updating of members list
- Update the web frequently with new content, tools and design
- Add user-friendly search facility
- Improve navigation to allow easy access to information contained in the website

Regular dissemination of career development opportunities such as grants, jobs and fellowships

- Capacity building opportunities for young professionals fellowships and scholarships
- Training workshops
- Highlight post-doctoral programmes in various universities
- Sponsorship of young professionals to international conferences
- Post calls for research proposals, funding, postdoctoral fellowships, donors databases

Development of interactive forums such as blogs and discussion forums to enhance interaction among members

- Regularly post guest articles on current affairs from members
- Develop a Question-Answer interaction forum for the farmers and development agencies
- Introduce and link to individual member bulletins, blogs and websites
- Develop database of volunteers who can contribute articles for the website.
- Maintain expanded and updated email lists
- Establish a consulting group of members to collectively bid for tenders and consultancies in Africa similar to the American Enterprise

Annex 2. Graphical Analyses of the responses from the survey



