



The Green Innovation Centre at AfricaRice is making agricultural learning accessible with the help of the **Moodle Mobile App**.



## The Green Innovation Centre

(or CIVA: Centre d'Innovations Vertes pour l'Agro-alimentaire) is part of the 'One World, No Hunger' initiative – funded by the German Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development.

CIVA is currently working with AfricaRice in Benin to address the unemployment issues in agriculture in the region.

As is the case in most African countries, Benin has a very young population, with a high level of unemployment. Agriculture is the

only sector where the youth could find jobs, but it is also where they are needed to produce the food required by the country.

AfricaRice's work is focussed on assisting young students from Agricultural Colleges to learn practical skills of how to work with

farmers as advisers. Or to find jobs or create their own businesses in rural parts of the country.

Being able to offer courses online to young agricultural students is essential to AfricaRice's work.

# Problem

CIVA and AfricaRice has the objective to increase the income of small farming enterprises, boost employment and improve regional food supply through the dissemination of agricultural and food production innovations.

They want to achieve these objectives by promoting rural employment for youth, in agriculture and related sectors.

They do this by working with the 10 Agricultural Colleges in Benin, and offer their students free access to courses that top up their training and better prepare them to work with farmers as advisers.

However, due to challenges such as distance and lack of available time / resources for face to face training, CIVA and AfricaRice needed to deliver their training in an e-learning format.

Dr Bruno Tran, CIVA Vocational Training Expert from AfricaRice, said, "We offer young people valuable field experience and a role to play in the dissemination of farming innovations."

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**"In order to reach more young people and make learning available to them wherever they are in the country and whenever they can spare the time, we have to choose the e-learning format."**

**"We knew that young people would be particularly receptive to internet based solutions."**

# Action

CIVA and AfricaRice chose Moodle to create and deliver their agricultural courses online.

The choice was made easier as Bruno had worked with Moodle previously and was aware of its capabilities in delivering a collaborative learning environment.

"I worked for 10 years as an Associate Lecturer for the Open University, in the UK, probably the largest distance learning University in the world. This helped me experience and understand what is needed to deliver effective e-learning," said Bruno.

"Choosing Moodle for what we do here was the simplest decision I made in the whole process: I wanted a widely used platform, with a good reputation and adequate support."

"I also wanted it to be open source and free, because this is closest to the values of development as we see it."

"Technically, Moodle offers us exactly what we need: we develop courses in the platform, and we then manage courses and students through the platform, delivering course certificates automatically after success at a final test, and Moodle helps us to produce various reports on progress."

CIVA and AfricaRice are also currently working with Moodle Mobile 3.3 to offer their courses off-line and address the internet connectivity issue in Benin, like in many other African countries.

"We equip the young people with whom we work with locally-sourced 7inch Android tablets they can use to work in the field and to access the internet where there is a Wi-Fi connection, explained Bruno.

"We also opened 21 offices across the country where our young people can use the mobile data router enabled Wi-Fi connection to study our courses. But the farmers' groups with whom they work are sometimes an hour or two away from the nearest office, and transport in rural areas is often difficult to find or organise. So I really wanted to provide our young people with a way to work off-line."

"Our courses make heavy use of lessons (one of the many components available to a course designer in Moodle) and these have been made available to off-line work with later synchronisation in version 3.3."

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**"The whole team, here at CIVA, was really excited with this new release, because it means our students can very soon download a complete course at one of the offices, and then study it in their own time, in the communities where they work. This is very much the kind of flexible tool they need."**



Photo: Bruno Tran



# Results

## For students and others in the agricultural industry in Benin

The obvious benefits of having an online learning format in Moodle are that students at AfricaRice can study their courses in their own time, small amounts at a time if they prefer.

They can also find a space where they can concentrate, wherever they are located and even study with friends.

Off-line access will also be extremely valuable for other users of AfricaRice's courses, which are free to use – one only needs to register.

This means that existing extension agents, NGO staff, farmers associations and current students of agricultural colleges can also use the courses, and they just need short and irregular visits to a cybercafé to download a course and then upload their test answers for marking and receipt of a course certificate if they achieved the required mark.

## Meeting organisational mission

For CIVA and AfricaRice, an online learning format in Moodle means that they can reach a larger audience, despite the limitations of internet connectivity in rural parts of the country.

A wider reach also means that more young people are being provided with the opportunity to gain the knowledge, innovation and skills to better prepare them to work with farmers as advisers - securing not only their economic future but also supporting the agricultural industry with the latest, and most sustainable practices.

So far, AfricaRice have over 30 courses on their Moodle platform and are seeing an excellent uptake of their courses with about 250 students completing most courses.



Photo: Nicola Swan

## AfricaRice

To view AfricaRice's e-learning platform please visit [elearning.afris.org](http://elearning.afris.org)

You can read more about AfricaRice on [www.africarice.org](http://www.africarice.org) and on CIVA on [www.gix.de/en/worldwide/32209.html](http://www.gix.de/en/worldwide/32209.html)



Photo: Tristan Vostry