Speaker 1: The Missouri State Journal, a weekly program, keeping you in touch with Missouri State University.

Emily Yeap: Despite challenges of international travel due to COVID-19, Missouri State University's Dr. Benjamin Onyango got to spend some time in Kenya this past summer, working with Kenya Assemblies of God East University. An agriculture professor, Onyango helped to develop agricultural courses for the Maasai community surrounding the university.

Their project was made possible by the Carnegie African Diaspora Fellowship Program. This is the second time Onyango has received this fellowship. The program started in 2013 to enable African-born scholars living in the U.S. or Canada to undertake projects at African higher education institutions. I'm Emily Yeap.

Onyango joins me today to talk about his work in Kenya.

Benjamin Onyango: This time around, I had to work with the Kenya Assemblies of God University in Kitengela. The interest was contribute directly to the food security issue on the Maasai community.

Emily Yeap: The Maasai community’s livelihood depends heavily on their cattle. This is an issue when drought kills the animals.

Benjamin Onyango: So, the thinking of the KAG and my thinking when we were building that proposal was, how do we transform the Maasai community to live better with the cow economy by supplementing it? You can only supplement the cow economy by providing water, and water is a big issue in that area. In order to gradually resolve that issue on a permanent basis is to think how can you provide a constant 365 supply of water.

Emily Yeap: To help the Maasai people sustain their lives beyond the cow, the church-sponsored KAG East University decided to develop short-term agricultural skill building courses.

Benjamin Onyango: So, where do you start? Arrived in Kenya the first week of May, we started working immediately. So we plan, what are we going to do? We're going to get out focus groups meetings with the community to know what are their priorities. What do they think is most important beyond the cow, so that whatever we suggest comes from them in terms of their training needs. Number two, we were to carry out the key informant interviews. The key players in the Maasai community are their spiritual leaders. The Pentecostal Assemblies of God is doing a wonderful job with these people. They know where you can be able to enter and make a change.

 So the church knowing that water is the problem, as sited about a hundred places in the Maasai community where they are going to sink boreholes. NGOs, thankfully from here in America, are joining hands with the Pentecostal Assemblies of God to sink those 100 boreholes. In those boreholes, they will be like the oasis in a desert where development now is going to span out to the community. And we have discussed these priorities in terms of the practical skills that they need in agriculture, to be able to have these established managed in ways that ensure success because you have the water.

Emily Yeap: The courses cover livestock and crops. They span across seven priority areas: kitchen garden establishment and management; nursery establishment and management practices; animal health and management practices; beekeeping and management practices; pasture and fodder production and management; soil and water conservation; and poultry production and management.

Onyango expands on a few of the areas.

Benjamin Onyango: Because of their cow, they need animal health and management practices. They know a lot about their cows, but if you can supplement these with the modern science, you can do better.

Beekeeping is key to empowering the community economically. They have a natural habitat for beekeeping and the honey that will be produced from the Maasai community will be superior, and marketing it under the Maasai label ... that's a breakthrough in your commerce already.

And add on poultry production and management. It increases their protein resources. Instead of killing a whole cow to feed your two children, slaughtering one chicken is not a big deal. The eggs will be there. Poultry hand-in-hand with what they are doing to expand their diets.

Emily Yeap: That was Dr. Benjamin Onyango, agriculture professor at Missouri State. I'm Emily Yeap for the Missouri State Journal

Speaker 1: For more information, contact the Office of University Communications at 417-836-6397. The Missouri State Journal is available online@ksmu.org.