



RUFORUM Annual General Meeting 2019

Research project management and development of interdisciplinary skills

Concept Note

Background

The Forum for Women Vice Chancellors in Africa (FAWoVC) has scheduled a 'skills enhancement training for post-doctoral fellows and emerging scientists' as a side-event in a symposium that will take place between 30 November and 3 December 2019. This symposium will be held prior to the Annual General Meeting of the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) that will run from 2 to 6 December 2019 in Cape Coast, Ghana. This symposium, organised in partnership with RUFORUM, is aimed at promoting inclusive participation of women in Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) in Africa. And as part of the project being funded by the Islamic Development Bank (IDB), leadership, management and mentorship training will be provided to the women Vice Chancellors in Africa and other top managers in institutions of higher learning in Africa to equip them with skills to attract, mentor and support emerging female academics in African universities. In parallel, there will be a skills enhancement training for Post-Doctoral fellows and emerging scientists and an interactive session to bring the two groups together for a platform for physical mentorship as required under the IDB project. The skills enhancement training for Post-Doctoral fellows and emerging scientists will target 50 Post-Doctoral Fellows and emerging scientists from selected universities in Africa and will focus on the management of research projects and the development of interdisciplinary skills needed herein.

Whereas classical project management is about controlling time and budget, the aspects of people-centredness and result-centredness are also key ingredients in delivering a successful project, both content-wise and usage-wise. Working together across institutions, borders and cultures and with a variety of stakeholders from different disciplines and socio-economic sectors is a challenge which requires symbiosis between project members, but also a coaching and mentoring project leader. Only when they all work in unison, they will be in a position to achieve the project's objectives and take credit of positive impacts. Similarly, the relations with the target groups, donor community and other stakeholders need to be symbiotic too. Surviving in this project inner and outer space, *id est*, the project environment, requires a full understanding of

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the various project management components as communication, project structure, strengths and weaknesses, leadership, system thinking, monitoring and evaluation, assumption control, risk management, time and budget management.

Aims and Objectives of the side Event

The overall aim of the side-event is to enable the post-doctoral fellows and emerging scientists improve their research project management skills and steer their project, project members and other stakeholders towards jointly achieved results. The meeting will present an opportunity for scientists to learn from each other and how to interact in an ever evolving project environment.

Approach and Methodology

The side-event meeting will be a facilitator-led meeting and in order to allow for active engagement of all participants. The facilitator will use plenary sessions, group work, role play and peer review. The use of visual aids including wall cards, flip-over charts and PowerPoint presentations will enable to capture contributions and ideas from individuals and groups.

It is expected that all invited participants are willing to fully engage in the three-day training session which is subdivided into the following sessions:

- The first day will be used to introduce the concept of project cycle management, project management terminology and project environment. Participants will be challenged to discuss on common project management language and the role they play as a project member within the project, but also perceived by the outside environment. They will have to map and analyse the stakeholders present in the project environment and the stakeholders' needs.
- The first half of the second day will be used to simulate project and stakeholder meetings on progress, risks and failure analysis, unforeseen events, and on annual financial monitoring. This will be followed by reflection and group work. Critical interventions by different groups will highlight the strengths and weaknesses of approaches applied by the various *ad hoc* installed project teams.
- The second half of the second day will concentrate on participatory leadership skills with a focus on information exchange methods, collection of information, effective meeting set-ups and people management.
- The first half of the third day groups will be focusing on designing and implementing a project communication strategy. The exploration of the needs of target audiences and the ways to service them will be looked

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at from different angles through group work and shared in a plenary session.

- The second half of the third day will be dedicated to communication skills (elevator pitches, influencing skills ...) and system thinking.
- The fourth day will focus on bringing the pieces together and individual participants visioning how to put what has been learnt in practice, and preparing for the Scientific sessions to be held 4 and 5th December 2019.

The exchange of experiences and ideas, and the various interactions will be very useful for the improvement of understanding the position of a project and its dynamics and the role a project leader has herein in the sphere of societal relevance with the ultimate goal to satisfy societal needs and to contribute to inclusive and sustainable development.

**Outputs/
outcomes**

The side event will deliver the following outputs and outcomes:

1. An improved understanding of the value of a project within the web of societal stakeholders.
2. An insight into participatory leadership methods.
3. An improved understanding of internal and external project communication.
4. A different view on result-oriented collaboration within a project team.

**Venue and
Participants**

The side event will take place at the University of Cape Coast in Ghana. The participants will be post-doctoral fellows and emerging scientists from higher education institutions and research organisations from various African countries.

**Side Event
Organizers
and Contact**

The organiser is Gerard den Ouden, independent consultant, facilitator of a series of proposal write-shops held for RUFORUM (gerard.den.ouden@telenet.be).

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