The Seventh African Higher Education Week and RUFORUM Triennial Conference

Plenary Session

Building Africa's Science, Technology and Innovation Capacity

Date: Wednesday, 08th December, 2021

Time: 11:30 - 14:00 WAT (GMT+1)

Venue: Palais des Congres de Cotonou, Benin

Event Link : https://bit.ly/3mVE6A9

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Background

Deployment of Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) has been generally accepted as an effective route to achieve equitable development at national level. Evidence for such has been achieved for countries such as China, Republic of Korea, Malaysia, and Singapore where national governments deliberately invested in knowledge generation, development of technologies and innovations to guide policy making, create jobs and improve service delivery for their citizens and consequently increase local tax revenue and exports.

Africa's Agenda 2063 aspires that Africa will be a prosperous continent with resources and means to drive its own development. The continent will *have well educated citizens and skills revolution underpinned by science, technology and innovation for a knowledge society*. As the first step to achieve this desired state, the Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa 2024 (STISA 2024) was developed in 2016. The STISA 2024 targets improvements in ST&I infrastructure,

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professional and technical competence, and entrepreneurial capacity as well as policies and programs. However, ST&I readiness and capacity in Africa is still significantly low compared to the rest of the world. Sub Saharan Africa (SSA) contributed only 1% of the global researchers with only 70 and 90 researchers per million inhabitants by 2013. The number of publications by 2014, were only 18,000, a mere 1.4% of the total global publications and by 2017, and the R&D expenditure dismally low at less than 0.5% of Africa's GDP. Three critical challenges impede Africa's capacity to effectively harness STI for development; i) skills deficit; ii) STI infrastructure; and iii) capital funding for STI based entrepreneurship.

The Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) has been exploring options to galvanise Agricultural Higher Education, Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy (AHESTI)/ Vision 2030. In operationalizing this strategy, RUFORUM developed five continental initiatives vis: (i) the Strengthening Higher Agricultural Education in Africa (SHAEA); (ii) Building Africa's Science, Technology and Innovation Capacity (BASTIC); (iii) Strengthening Africa's Innovation and Entrepreneurship Capacity (SASTIE); (iv) Regional Initiative to Strengthen Staff Capacity and Increase the Pool of Women Scientists in Africa (RISSCAW); and (v) the African Digital Agricultural Platform (AfriDAP. While all the continental initiatives target variants of science, technology and innovation, the Building Africa's Science Technology and Innovation Capacity (BASTIC) stands out as a driver for ST&I in all the other initiatives. The initiatives have been deliberated by several RUFORUM and other policy organs and received endorsement from continental and regional organizations. There is however, still room to move beyond rhetoric to action.

The RUFORUM 7th Higher Education Week and RUFORUM Triennial Conference to be hosted by the Government of Benin in partnership with RUFORUM member universities in Benin, under the theme *Operationalising Higher Education for Innovation, Industrialisation, Inclusion and Sustainable Economic Development in Africa: A Call for Action* is looking towards awakening this debate. Among the activities for the Conference is a blended **Plenary Session focusing on** *Higher Education: Building Africa's Science, Technology and Innovation Capacity.* From the regional perspective to be discussed at the Ministerial and Technical Experts Round Table, the Conference is moving towards localizing the dialogue to explore the low hanging fruits and those actions within the mandate of Benin Higher Education, Science Technology and Innovation framework that can be adopted and adapted to advance science technology and innovations at both the national and continental levels.

Dialogue Objectives

Engage high level political, technical and academic leadership to identify options for increased investment to build Africa's Science, Technology and Innovation Capacity.

i) To provide a platform for open sharing of experiences, lessons and emerging issues related to Building Africa's Science, Technology and Innovation Capacity
ii) To Identify areas where actors can pool expertise, infrastructure, funding and partnerships to achieve maximum impact related to Building Science, Technology and Innovation Capacity at national and regional levels

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iii) To propose areas of synergy, implementation and coordination mechanism for Building Africa's Science, Technology and Innovation Capacity at national, regional and continental levels
iv) To identify initiatives for the translation of ST&I into technologies that facilitate *Operationalising Higher Education for Innovation, Industrialisation, Inclusion and Sustainable Economic Development in Africa*

Rationale

The dialogue is intended to attract Government leaders, policy makers, technical teams, and funding agencies participants during the Triennial conference. It is convened to provide technical evidence on the country specific ST&I needs, gaps and required strategic actions for effectively harnessing ST&I for economic development and generate actions to be implemented at country level with regional cooperation.

Reaping benefits from ST&I for development requires a common understanding among policy makers, scientists, ST&I entrepreneurs and development partners. The plenary session will be an opportunity to lesson share and identify areas where actors can pool expertise, infrastructure, funding and partnerships to achieve maximum impact for capacity in science, technology and innovation at the national and continental level. The dialogue will feed into the technical experts meeting and the ministerial round table to inform the action plan for operationalization of the initiative that is envisaged at continental level.

Draft Agenda

Time	Activity
Moderator: Prof. Umezuruike Linus Opara, Stellenbosch University, South Africa	
11:30 - 11:35	Opening Remarks by Session Moderator Prof. Umezuruike Linus Opara, Stellenbosch University, South Africa
11:35 - 11:50	Keynote Address- Prof. Frans Swanepoel, Director, International Strategic Partnerships and Director, Food Systems Research Network for Africa, University of Pretoria, South Africa: Investment to Build ST&I capacity - Which way for Africa?
11:50 - 12:10	**Discussion**
12:10 - 13:10	Panel Discussion: Policy and Innovations for Reshaping Africa's ST&I Development 1. Hon. Dr. Itah Kandjii-Murangi, Minister of Higher Education, Technology and Innovation, Namibia 2. Hon. Agnes Makonda NyaLonje, Minister of Education, Malawi 3. Hon. Dr. Monica Musenero, Minister for Science, Technology and Innovation, Uganda 4. Hon. Prof. Eléonore Ladekan Yayi, Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Republic of Benin

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	5. Prof. Emmanuel Tanyi, Dean Faculty of Engineering and Technology, University of Buea, Cameroon
13:10 - 13:20	Development Partner perspective
13:20 - 13:40	**Discussion**
13:40 - 13:50	Prof. Achille Assogbadjo, University of Abomey Calavi, Benin: Summary of emerging issues and way forward
14:00 - 15:00	**Lunch Break**

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