Side Event Title

The Seventh African Higher Education Week and RUFORUM Triennial Conference 2021

An Integrated Approach to Workforce Education and Development:

The Experience of Virginia Tech's Center for International Research and Development International Engagements

Date: 9th December 2021

Time: 9:00-10:30 GMT+1

Venue: TBC, Blended (Link: https://bit.ly/3oK4NIS)

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Side Event Summary

In this Side Event the Virginia Tech Center for International Research, Education, and Development (CIRED), in conjunction with the Virginia Tech College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Global Programs (CALS Global), will demonstrate its partnership approach to the integrative view of agricultural workforce development and educational systems. Virginia Tech is the State of Virginia's most comprehensive university and its leading research institution. Virginia Tech offers about 280 undergraduate and graduate degree programs to more than 34,000 students and manages a research portfolio of more than $521 million annually. The university fulfils its role as a land-grant university by fostering a collaborative environment that integrates technology into all disciplines, so that the Virginia Tech community can serve as a force for positive change around the commonwealth of Virginia, the country, and the world. Virginia Tech has a long history of global engagement, including through the Center for International Research, Education and Development, with a current sponsored research and education portfolio of $60 million, and CALS Global which is the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences' global engagement unit. Through both units, and others, Virginia Tech engages in several collaborative programs in other African higher education initiatives such as World Bank's Africa Centres of Excellence (ACEs) and the PASET-RSIF program, among others. Virginia Tech's approach to these interventions is to harness its international network and innovative faculty and collaborators to create

effective workforce education and development (WED) programs, particularly agriculture, around the world. In this Side Event, we will share details of Virginia Tech's Workforce Education and Development (WED) programs whose focus is to provide administrative and capacity backstopping initiatives in WED. The overall objective is to integrate workforce and higher education strategies. Key WED initiatives designed and implemented by CIRED in conjunction with CALS Global and international partners include (1) positive youth development, (2) agricultural technical and vocational education and training (ATVET), (3) higher education and certificate development, (4) gender-responsive approaches to agricultural development and poverty reduction programs, and (5) human and institutional capacity building.

Background and Integrated Actions for Workforce Development

According to Conway, (2016), agriculture plays a critical role in economic development of developing nations with it making a significant contribution to gross domestic product (GDP) and employment opportunity to majority. This position is supported by Freer, (2015, p. 2) who gives an example of Cambodia where agriculture contributes "29% of the country's GDP and employs 59% of the workforce". Freer, (2015) further postulates that smallholder farmers, educators, youths, and women are at the center of economic development, food security and poverty reduction discourses; hence it is important to align agricultural education and training (AET) to address agricultural workforce employability and build partners' capacity to identifying shortfalls of AET and fill existing technological, capacity, and institutional gaps. The collaborative approach to filling these gaps, according to Conway, places the agricultural sector actors as innovators hence eliminating top-down (monologue/instructor-centered) approach to workforce development, extension, and dissemination of technologies. Collaboration enhances co-creation of knowledge which in turn increases uptake of technologies by the agricultural workforce.

Integral in the workforce development effort are the youth, women, and institutions of higher learning, private and public sector partners, and TVET institutions. The following past and ongoing collaborative initiatives summarize Virginia Tech's efforts to enhance skills for employability, research, agri-entrepreneurship, agroecological efforts, robust community food systems, and resilience in communities, particularly Africa.

1. Technical and vocational education and training – For the purpose of this Triennial, we will focus on the agricultural technical and vocational education and training (ATVET), although Virginia Tech implemented interventions in others such as natural resource management TVET, hospitality and tourism TVET, among others.
2. Positive Youth Development (PYD) – this is implemented through the Senegal 4-H program which benefitted over 600 youths and 100 adult facilitators trained on skills enhancement, leadership, advocacy, and community service. The success of this program also saw 4-H get embedded in government structures.

3. Higher education and Certificate Development – Virginia Tech collaborates with other higher education institutions to develop, design, and benchmark programs at degree level and at short-term skill-based certificate level. Such certificate programs are tailored to suit industry and other stakeholder needs
4. Women and gender in development – the focus of this initiative is to advance gender equality by ensuring discussions around gender roles, affirmative action, power structures in communities, empowerment, and workforce employability development.
5. Human and institutional capacity building – the focus here is to collaborate to strengthen education systems by building the capacity of teachers, instructors, faculty, administrators, and program managers. The objective of these capacity building and institutional strengthening initiatives is to best place higher education institution stakeholders in positions to deliver on the workforce employability development.

Event Purpose: The purpose of this side-event is to demonstrate that it is possible to design interventions together with communities and partners for common good. This side-event will share the good practices of these five key interventions by Virginia Tech, including the challenges experienced during implementation. VT will further elucidate possible areas of future collaboration or gaps/opportunities for future engagement

Event delivery approach: Presenters from Virginia Tech, and possibly African collaborators, will jointly demonstrate how we used several approaches and strategies to record success. We also propose a segment for representative direct beneficiaries to give accounts of the outcomes of these interventions.

Target audience: Our presentation is targeted toward anyone in the higher education and agricultural sectors who is interested in productive, successful, and results-oriented partnerships.

Expected outputs/outcomes: A productive dialogue and linkages on opportunities for further collaboration on the areas of interest. Further, we seek to engage African intellectuals on whether they feel our interventions addressed pressing needs in Africa or if there are different approaches we could employ.

Event requirements: This will be a blended event with no limit or restrictions to attend.

CO-ORGANISERS:

Session Program

Moderator:

Time	Activity
20 minutes	• **Presentation by CIRED team**
20 minutes	• **Joint commentary (VT and selected partner reps) and question-answer session**
15 minutes	• **Comments by partnership direct beneficiaries (private sector, student of faculty representatives)**
15 minutes	• **Q&A**

References

Conway, G. (2016). *One Billion Hungry :* Can We Feed the World? October.

Freer, T. J. (2015). *Modernizing the Agricultural Education and Training Curriculum*. September, 25.