

AAUN Africa Forum, 11 May 2015 Johannesburg

Welcome and Opening

- Professor Cheryl de la Rey

Honourable Guests, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As Vice Chancellor and Principal am delighted to welcome you to second African Forum of the Australia African Universities Network, the AAUN, hosted by the University of Pretoria. As a University we are honoured to host this event which precedes the formal opening of the ACU/SARIMA Conference. I wish to extend a special welcome to:

- Prof John Hearn the Co-Chairperson of the AAUN
- Vice-Chancellors, Deputy Vice-Chancellors
- Project leaders and participants

The Australia Africa Universities Network (AAUN) is the only consortium of universities spanning Australia and Africa and in a short period of time since its establishment has succeeded in injecting new vigour into the academic relationships between the two continents.

Our first partnership event was convened in 2013 in Sydney, Australia when we explored the power of partnerships. On that occasion I addressed the topic of leadership and governance in African higher education by focussing on internationalization as this is, after all, a defining feature of the AAUN whereby a number of Australian and African universities have committed ourselves to working together through a structured network or consortium.

For African universities, internationalization is not only about equipping future generations of leaders with the relevant skills and values to contribute to African development in a world of globalization, but also about ensuring that universities provide holistic educational opportunities that will produce graduates who embrace responsible citizenship. Graduates who not only have narrow technical and academic skills that will ensure their own individual success; instead graduates who have attributes that are likely to contribute to sustainable development. It is about making a contribution to local and global well-being with pressing issues such as peace and security, food security and health and well-being.

The AAUN has succeeded in opening up an opportunity for member universities to demonstrate how two regions can pool their expertise to make new inroads into some long-standing issues. The AAUN model, through its distinctive leadership and governance features has the potential to be an exemplar of how international partnerships can contribute to the transformation of African universities.

To ensure that the AAUN has an impact, it has been necessary to select a few priority themes as reflected in the program for the workshops. Given the wide range of expertise in African and Australian higher education systems there are a smorgasbord of possibilities for collaboration. However, it is crucial that our energies, expertise and limited resources are channelled where there is both greatest need and maximum likelihood of impact. Agriculture and food security, public health and education constitute the very foundation or building blocks for African development, and mining and minerals are a key contributor to our African regional economy.

It is gratifying to note that the AAUN themes are well-aligned with the African Union's long-term agenda for African development, Agenda 2063. This is also the year in which the Millennium development Goals (MDGs) will be succeeded by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Through pooling of research expertise in African and Australian universities we have an opportunity to bring new perspectives and insights to global priorities. We have learned from the experience of South Africa and many other African countries that economic growth as measured in GDP terms is insufficient to bring about lasting improvements in quality of life. It is obvious that we need new approaches to bring about sustainable African development and that we can learn from the Australian experience which is now ranked among countries with enviable quality of life indicators.

The AAUN, as a diverse platform of expertise accompanied by the vision and leadership, offers the opportunity to bring perspectives to problems that sometimes seem intractable. The AAUN now has a suite of active projects upon which we wish to build. In this meeting we have an opportunity to expand our modes of collaboration to include possibilities such as

- joint degrees;
- dual badged PhDs with co-supervision across borders;
- global undergraduate degrees where semesters are offered by universities in different countries for one degree either via student mobility or virtually;
- greater collaboration with industry in R&D, curriculum design and delivery, internships and scholarships.

With this in mind I wish you all a warm welcome and may we use this opportunity to explore these opportunities and take the AAUN to new levels of impact.

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