



AAUN AUSTRALIA FORUM 2017

Communiqué

The annual AAUN Australia Forum was held at the University Club of Western Australia, focusing on the theme Australia Africa Education Partnerships for Development.

Hosted by the University of Western Australia and allied to UWA Research Week, the forum attracted over 100 delegates from across Australia and Africa including prominent international researchers, High Commissioners, embassy representatives, government officials and business leaders. The AAUN Australia Forum 2017 is also a part of Australia Africa Week, and a partner with Africa Down Under 2017. This partnership enables teamwork in building Australia-Africa programs.

Mr Matthew Neuhaus, First Assistant Secretary, Middle East and Africa Division, DFAT, delivered the opening presentation and outlined Australia's continuing engagement and commitment to Africa in selected countries and fields where Australia and Africa have mutual challenges and objectives and can work towards optimal solutions.

The conference focused on areas of education partnerships for development; practical implementation of UN Sustainable Development Goals and the role of universities and networks in achieving these goals; in addition, speakers highlighted security in environment, food, nutrition, and health; and the synergies between Africa-Australia-China in Education, Extractives and Business.

The purpose of the forum was to facilitate building equal partnerships in AAUN's key research areas and brought together researchers, embassy representatives, government officials and Heads of Mission to pool their strategic thinking and experience in developing the best priority programs for Australia and Africa.

In four plenary sessions, the conference identified opportunities, gaps and ways in which Australia and Africa can take best advantage from a time of special focus and capacity, with limited resources.

Australian and African engagement remains strong and productive. It is up to us to build focus and critical mass that delivers mutual benefits within the framework of the United Nations Sustainability Goals, priorities and policies, and a strengthening of intellectual and cultural ties. This is certain to be with selected countries, programs and projects, but requires teamwork and endurance to deliver results.

As conference hosts and sponsors, we thank the University of Western Australia, the Australian Government and its agencies and ACIAR for support of the conference, the research programs and the successful meeting of minds. We commit to delivering results and outcomes over the next year and beyond.

We acknowledge all panellists, discussants and stakeholders in contributing to a successful forum, and one that will add to the inspiration and teamwork required to deliver successful partnerships.

We are not deterred by the shortage of resources, as the quality of the partnerships arising will attract the necessary support.

In this regard we note the outcomes of the AAUN Australia Forum 2017, with follow up in 2017-18.

1. Opening Session - Australia Africa: Education Partnerships for Development:

- Knowledge must be turned into bread and butter. Joint applications for grants are a vehicle
- SDG 4 'Quality Education' is highly important for economic development and employment
- It's not just a matter of more education, but what kind of education – who should teach, what should be taught
- Prepare for a globally competitive knowledge economy
- The Australia Africa Awards remains a key vehicle to assist African countries build their capacity to deliver sustainable development
- DFAT plans to expand ADU with an event for African and Australian Ministers of Education
- A [whitepaper on Australia's foreign policy](#) is coming out in November
- See '[A strategy for Australia's engagement with Africa](#)' from the Advisory Group on Australia-Africa Relations, for information on DFAT's Australia-Africa strategy and activities
- Our AAUN network of 20 universities is significant and can address many global concerns
- We need to build broader knowledge partnerships such as ACIAR, DFAT, Department of Education, Australia Africa Awards and links to similar networks in Africa.
- Fundamental questions in research are becoming more complex and we need to prepare for a longer view, building longer term partnerships
- Issues: 'down with fees', African leadership, post colonialism
- A focus on students' needs and support is essential.
- There are big opportunities with SDGs, as these policies and priorities will also drive resources.
- There is reason for optimism: we have achieved a large community of scholars across many disciplines in AAUN.

2. Strategic Session - Practical implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals in Higher Education, Research, Entrepreneurism, Employment – the role of Networks

- Africa needs to produce more research to achieve SDGs. Only universities can deliver this and partnerships are key.
- Invest in people and entrepreneurship in addition to the current focus on jobs.
- Encourage the private sector to get involved when tendering for awards.

3. Strategic Session – Security: Environment, food, nutrition, health

- Australian government and its agencies to create more opportunities for strategic research investment, tapping into the best of Australian science
- 'Monsanto or organic' – if food science is not at that cutting edge, the food factory is going to win
- Invest in research mobility which can be transformative for emerging and established researchers

- The engagement of Think Tanks and policy institutes with the AAUN is important – what role can they play? The global policy framework is improving, and we should align where we can contribute to priorities.

4. Strategic Session – The Synergies between Africa-Australia-China in education, Extractives, and Business

- China is Australia’s and Africa’s biggest trading partner with some common aspirations in Africa
- Opportunities for education and research capacity building
- Synergies between Australia-Africa-China could focus on SDGs and the Chinese Belt and Road approach. Education partnerships can help deliver on these goals. Suggested to set up small projects to tap this issue, such as energy education to help develop low carbon technology.
- Experience in addressing issues arising from proximity of mining sites, to traditional indigenous land and environmentally sensitive areas – ability to negotiate with multiple stakeholders
- China has access to much needed finances and Australia has the social license to work together to strengthen trade, investment and development in Africa.

5. Closing Session and projections:

- SDGs joint action: we will align appropriately in our new strategic plan 2018-20
- Quality of education as one of the pre-requirements for development
- Understand the complexity of our partnerships - know how to implement what, to achieve results
- Mobilise networks for additional supervising and mentoring capacity for early career researchers
- Mobilisation of African diaspora in Australia – establish a point of contact
- Advocate for additional investment into science, tech, education to increase both continents’ global competitiveness
- Expand post doc exchange, especially with the Africa Awards expanding
- Expanding into joint courses, joint training and joint degrees, developed at bilateral levels
- Case for Humanities and Social Sciences as e.g. to strengthen programs through cultural understanding, especially where these dimensions strengthen research partnerships
- Suggestion for Sustainable Mining Institute to follow up IM4DC
- China-Africa-Australia exchange e.g. Chinese post docs coming to Africa on joint projects
- Transfer of technology, opportunities for ideas and business development.

We wish all those attending our best regards, and ask all to remain engaged and active as we move ahead. Please consult the AAUN website which will carry continuing developments and offers further conference reporting including PowerPoint presentations and photos.

Professor John Hearn

Professor Frans Swanepoel

AAUN Co-Chair (Australia)

AAUN Alternate Chair (Africa)