
AAUN Internal Assessment

November 2021

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INTRODUCTION

The Australia Africa Universities Network (AAUN) is now in its eighth year. AAUN comprises 22 members, with 10 from Australia and 12 from Africa. In the next three years, the AAUN plans to carefully expand its membership in Africa and Australia and consider expanding membership to a limited number of global partners.

As the AAUN progresses from its establishment into a phase of consolidation, it is expedient to reflect on the network's success and challenges, the benefit of AAUN to its members, and understand the implications of the aforementioned for the network. By understanding the network's achievements and value, AAUN will more effectively be able to highlight to governments, funding bodies, and industry collaborators the research profile and capabilities of the network.

In this context, AAUN undertook an internal monitoring and assessment exercise in 2020. While implementing the assessment, the COVID-19 pandemic caused major disruption to the planned activities of the AAUN – including aspects of the assessment. As a result, the assessment was delayed and was only finalised in 2021.

PURPOSE OF THE ASSESSMENT

The first purpose of the assessment was to understand what the AAUN has achieved since its inception in line with its intended purpose and Strategy. Through gaining a clear, evidence-based perspective on what has been achieved, the network will (i) be able to more clearly articulate to members and potential members what the benefit of membership is, and (ii) be able to argue for support convincingly to governments, funding bodies and industry collaborators.

The second purpose was to understand the research profile of the AAUN members using bibliometric analysis. Through gaining insights into the profile and strengths of individual members, the AAUN will be able to (i) identify areas of common research strength or interest among members, potentially utilising this knowledge to help researchers and administrators within member institutions to more efficiently identify collaboration opportunities¹; (ii) identify the level of collaboration that already exists between African and Australian members within the network and (iii) create a robust case for support through demonstrating collective expertise around common agendas (for example the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), regional agendas² and areas of shared national priority). The outcomes of the bibliometric assessment are reported in a separate report.

The third purpose is to inform the operationalisation of the AAUN 2020-2022 strategy. By reflecting on its successes and challenges over the past seven years, the AAUN will be able to harness its members' collective insights and wisdom and the researchers it has supported to inform the best way forward for the network's new strategic direction towards 2022.

¹ This includes new opportunities and potential for matching and identifying collaborators for PRDF grants

² Regional: Africa Agenda 2063, Australia's Indo-Pacific Priorities, and the Belt and Road Initiative of China

METHODOLOGY

The assessment focused on five broad areas: the network's profile and visibility, the relevance of the AAUN, the effectiveness and efficiency of AAUN activities, the impact or change that AAUN activities have enabled, and sustainability.

Within each broad area, a limited number of sub-areas were explored. These sub-areas served as the broad assessment questions (see Appendix A).

STAKEHOLDERS ENGAGED

Three groups of internal stakeholders were engaged in the assessment through a combination of mixed-methods surveys and in-depth and in-depth interviews.

- The **AAUN Secretariat** were invited to participate in in-depth, one-on-one interviews.
- All **AAUN members** (through the Steering Group representatives (n=22)) were invited to participate in a short, primarily quantitative survey.

The intention was that these surveys should be complemented with a small set of focus groups at the March 2020 AAUN-Africa Forum (Pretoria) and a limited number of one-on-one interviews. However, the forum did not take place due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and only the online video conference-based interviews were conducted.

- All **former and current PRDF grant holders** (n=53) were requested to complete a short online survey. These were supplemented with a bibliometric analysis, and in cases where a survey suggests that a grant has been particularly impactful in terms of (i) knowledge production, (ii) leveraging resources, (iii) or facilitating change beyond academia, one-on-one interviews were conducted. Significant components of the survey tool developed for the assessment will be utilised moving forward as a tool for monitoring AAUN research grants.

A **document analysis** of all previously submitted PRDF grant reports was undertaken and used to triangulate and supplement findings from the surveys and interviews with grant holders.

[A group of external stakeholders, who have previously engaged with the AAUN and are familiar with its purpose and activities were invited to provide written inputs.](#)

The bibliometric data combined with inputs from AAUN internal stakeholders (the Secretariat, Steering Group members and PRDF grant recipients) provide a depth and breadth of quantitative and qualitative data that speak to the three purposes of the assessment.

DATA COLLECTION

The member survey was distributed to all Australian and African members of the Steering Group. The response rate was very low despite several reminders from the AAUN Co-Chairs and the researcher. In total, only six fully completed responses were received. The survey results presented in this report thus must be interpreted with caution and should be interpreted in conjunction with qualitative responses from the video conference-based interviews.

On the other hand, it must also be noted that compared to typical response rates for online surveys, this response rate is not disproportionately low (27% of member organisations submitted a response, and online surveys typically have a 10-15% response rate). Five video conference-based interviews were held, including with all members of the Secretariat.

The grant holder survey was distributed to all current and former PRDF grant holders (n=53). A total of 20 responses were available for analysis (response rate of 38%). Although a higher response rate, close to or at 100%, would have been desirable, this response rate is also not disproportionately low for online surveys.

Grant reports for 42 grants (80% of total) were available for analysis. Reports were a combination of interim and final reports, and thus not all reports contained the end-point outcomes of the grants. These reports were collated into an excel spreadsheet for purposes of document analysis to supplement the information obtained from the survey with PRDF grant holders.

[Seven external stakeholders were invited and five provided feedback \(see Appendix B\).](#)

FINDINGS

UNIQUENESS OF THE NETWORK

FINDING: AAUN is unique in its geographic focus and positioning

The AAUN is the only knowledge-focused, membership-based network that focuses exclusively on Australia-Africa relationships and research partnerships. This geographic focus is an aspect that sets the network apart from the many other networks its members may belong to.

The network's geography-based focus is of strategic relevance from a geopolitical perspective. Despite the potential value of increased collaboration between Australia and Africa, there has been limited political focus and investment on establishing strong partnerships between the two. This is in contrast, for example, to where Australia has invested heavily in its relationships with China and countries in South-East Asia, given the close geographic proximity.

"...the main influence certainly is that it breaks the isolation of a place [island] like Australia, which has a different geography. They usually ... engage from a developing country perspective; and Africa who usually works [with the] North. So it's quite unique that these two ... work together in higher education, and research."
External Stakeholder

The AAUN has sustained its activities despite this drawback, working to establish itself as a platform to advocate for and develop stronger multi-sectoral partnerships between Australia and Africa.

This unique positioning and focus are key strengths of the network that need to be leveraged.

AAUN has also placed, since the time of its inception, an emphasis on creating equal partnerships. The model of having a Secretariat in both Africa and Australia has enabled this. This dual secretariat model is undoubtedly the exception and not the norm in other networks.

PRIMARY BENEFIT AND VALUE PROPOSITION OF THE AAUN

The benefits of AAUN membership, along with the value proposition of the AAUN were explored in the surveys and interviews.

To get a sense of the key benefits and overall value of the AAUN to its members and grant holders, a combination of likert-type and open-ended questions were asked in the survey, including questions related to members' assessment of whether benefits of membership outweigh costs and grant holder's overall experience.

Both the AAUN members and grant holder surveys asked respondents in a qualitative question to reflect on the primary benefit and value proposition of the AAUN.

FINDING: AAUN is considered valuable and beneficial to its members and grant holders

The vast majority of responding Steering Group members (83%) indicated that the benefits and outcomes of membership outweigh the input of institutional resources (human, financial or infrastructure) to some extent.

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When asked about their overall satisfaction as an AAUN PRDF grant holder, 90% indicated they were either satisfied or very satisfied with their overall experience.

FINDING: AAUN creates opportunities for grant holders to network and collaborate

The primary benefit of the AAUN PRDF grants to the grant holders is the opportunity to collaborate across continents on research projects, and the opportunity for networking, mobility, and exchange.

Through these opportunities to network and collaborate, researchers have been able to generate knowledge, publish in international journals, build their skills, and leverage additional funding.

The thematic summaries below illustrate the qualitative responses from the PRDF grant holders regarding the primary benefit of the PRDF grants.

Table 1: Thematic qualitative summary of the primary benefit of AAUN PRDF grant

<p>a. Opportunity for networking, mobility, and exchange</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Developing new networks with different African universities▪ It helps you to expand your network▪ I established a network which I still work with▪ Networking and exposure opportunities through the grant▪ It enabled me to attend a conference.▪ The mobility of the student supported under this programme▪ The ability to convene two research workshops to advance the research project and bring in additional participants▪ Networking opportunities <p>b. Opportunity for collaboration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The grant gives me the opportunity to establish collaborative relationships with scholars from AAUN partner members and beyond. This would not be possible without the grant.▪ Working with a multi-disciplinary team▪ It gave me the opportunity to work with a researcher from [Australian University] as well as [South African University], to visit Australia and to write two articles.▪ The grant enabled me to visit Australia, to gain more of an understanding of their higher education system and to work with a researcher from [Australia] as well as [South Africa] on an issue of mutual concern.▪ Working with new colleagues in Africa (though interrupted by the coronavirus).▪ Developing collaborators in Africa▪ The opportunity to develop research ideas with collaborators in Africa and Australia that I would not have had before.▪ Linkage with and the opportunity to work with African colleagues on projects of common interest. It has provided valuable seed money to get collaborations going.▪ I have had the chance to grow a relationship with Kenyan universities that was begun in 1975 with my first PhD student who was from Kenya. To visit [the university] for an extended period has allowed me to initiate projects that will increase research collaboration between our institutions. <p>c. Knowledge production</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ We published a manuscript from the work I did while there [in Australia]
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- It gave me the opportunity ... to write two articles which have been published in international, peer reviewed and accredited journals.
- It led to published articles in high quality international journals.
- d. Skills and capacity building**
- AAUN provided me with skills and knowledge to conduct transdisciplinary research. It enhanced my leadership skills as I was able to lead experienced scholars and professors from different disciplines and universities
- e. Financial support for research, and seed-grant to help leverage additional funding**
- The financial means to kickstart innovative project ideas that have potential to emerge into sustainable activities.
- Allowed me to conduct a pilot study and access larger funding.
- The ability to use the PRDF to leverage other internal and external funding to support the project.

Primary benefit of the AAUN to member institutions

The opportunities for staff to participate in the PRDF research grants, network with institutions on the other continent and opportunities for collaboration across institutions were significant benefits of membership.

The thematic summaries below provide the qualitative responses from the Steering Group members regarding the primary benefit of AAUN membership and what would not have been possible to achieve without the AAUN as well as some contributions from external stakeholders.

The benefit of the AAUN to its members needs to be explored in greater depth, possibly through a facilitated Steering Group discussion at one of the AAUN Forums, as well feedback from external stakeholders to draw a more substantive conclusion than what is provided in the response below.

- a. Most important benefit**
- Connecting with African universities (and Australian Universities) through seed funding projects. Networking and workshops participation at AAUN meetings in Africa and Australia
- Generate new research collaborations between African and Australian universities.
- Helping to consolidate our University's African activities and helping to inform our Africa Strategy. AAUN has also provided a broader perspective of member institution activities and the potential for institutional collaboration.
- Being part of the network and the opportunity for staff to be involved in seeing research projects with others across the two continents.
- The AAUN broke the isolation of Australian partnerships with regards to higher education and research.
- b. What would not have been possible without the AAUN**
- Access to the networks (leaders and researchers) which strengthens the African institutions involved.
- Increased awareness and relationship building with Universities in Australia and, importantly, Africa where research partnerships and exchanges can be developed.
- Recent success with a larger funded project (for five years) with six African countries. Direct connection and collaboration with relevant researchers from AAUN member universities.
- Partnerships with Australian institutions who want to do development work in Africa.

RESEARCH OUTCOMES

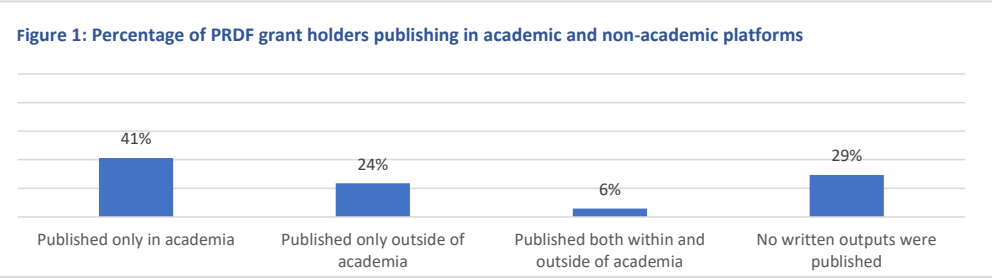
AAUN is primarily focused on research. The PRDF aims to catalyse new research collaborations that address significant challenges facing both Australia and Africa. Each grant is worth approximately AUD 10,000 and may be used to fund exploratory research, targeted workshops, planning events, faculty exchanges and forming collaborative networks, among other activities. The PRDF teams are intended to be "ready for business" international teams and are a significant outcome that would not have been achieved without the AAUN.

The assessment investigated the extent to which PRDF research has been published and presented on academic and non-academic platforms.

External stakeholders noted that one AAUN's strengths is to connect researchers with different perspectives to each other to establish research groups who can focus on the SDG's. Research grants to start research are seen as a key success.

FINDING: AAUN funded research has been widely published and presented on academic and non-academic platforms

A large proportion of PRDF grant holders who responded to the survey indicated that they published their research on either academic (41%) or non-academic (24%) platforms, with a small proportion (6%) publishing their research in both academic and non-academic platforms (see Figure 1). The proportion of researchers who have not yet published is roughly equivalent to the proportion with ongoing projects, and several publications are thus expected for the future from these yet to be completed projects.



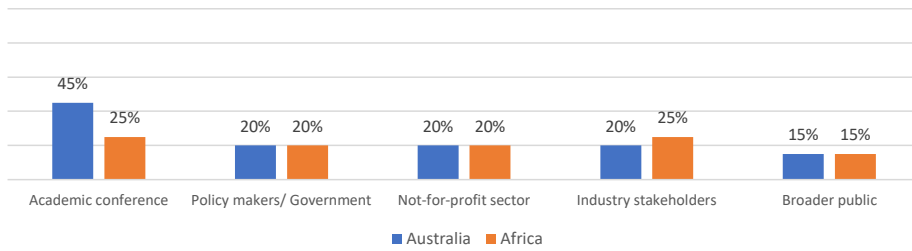
Data from PRDF annual reports provide evidence for at least 24 written outputs (academic and non-academic) emanating from PRDF research and up to 51 more planned or in progress outputs.

Two-thirds of PRDF grant holders indicated in the survey that their research had been presented to either an academic or other audience in Australia. Within Australia, a quarter of researchers had presented to an academic audience, 20% to an audience outside academia and 20% to both an academic and non-academic audience.

The majority of research projects (70%) had been presented to an academic or other audience in Africa. Ten percent of projects had only been presented to an academic audience, 45% had only been presented to audiences outside academia, and a small percentage (15%) had been presented in both academic and non-academic audiences.

Figure 2 illustrates the audiences where PRDF research has been presented on each continent. With the exception of presentations at academic conferences, where a higher proportion of research has been presented in Australia, the proportion of research presented to each stakeholder group in Australia and Africa similar.

Figure 2: Percentage of PRDF research presented on academic and non-academic platforms



When triangulated with data from the PRDF reports, similar results are obtained. Three-quarters of PRDF grant holders (n=32) had presented their research at a conference, workshop, symposium or internal meeting.

PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATION

Partnerships are at the heart of the AAUN's vision of *High impact, strategic educational and research partnerships providing sustainable solutions to challenges jointly facing Australia and Africa* and its mission to *enhance targeted Africa-Australia partnerships through a network of collaborative research and education*.

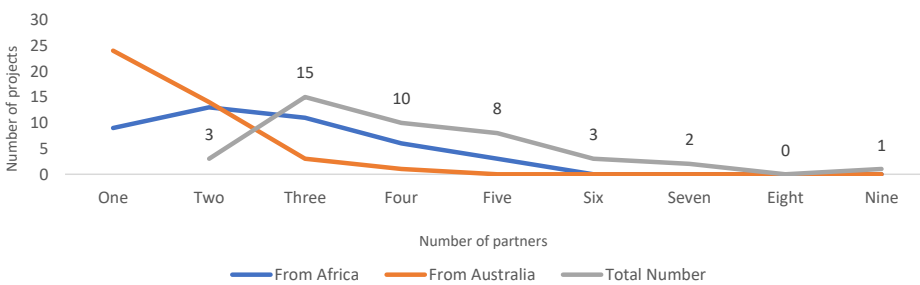
FINDING: AAUN is a key enabler for creating opportunities for inter-continental and intra-continental collaboration

PRDF grants are implemented in partnership between researchers at AAUN member universities, as well as partners outside of the network.

Research partnerships between AAUN members

Most PRDF projects had 3 or 4 AAUN member partner institutions collaborating, and the vast majority (86%) had five or fewer (see Figure 3). More than half (57%) of projects had one Australian University partner in the collaboration, compared to only 21% of projects that had only one African partner. Most projects (80%) had more than one Africa member partner.

Figure 3: Number of AAUN member partners per project: by continent and cumulative



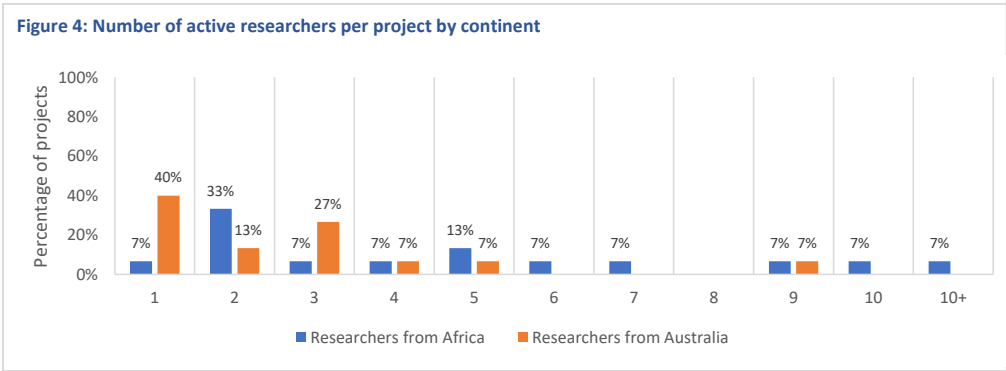
A deeper examination of the collaborations with African partners (see Table 2) shows that projects most frequently involved partners from South Africa (67% of projects included at least one South African partner) or partners from Kenya (43% of projects included at least one partner from Kenya). This finding is partly explained by the fact that South Africa has multiple members in the AAUN, and it is thus expected that they have a higher proportional representation than other countries. Several projects have more than one South African partner.

Table 2: Number of projects per African member country

	Number projects	% of projects
Ethiopia	2	5%
Ghana	9	21%
Kenya	18	43%
Malawi	4	10%
Mauritius	9	21%
Nigeria	11	26%
South Africa	28	67%
Uganda	15	36%
Zambia	4	10%

The distribution of active researchers per project by continent is shown in Figure 4. On average, projects had 5 African and 2-3 Australian researchers on the project. Forty percent of projects had one Australian researcher associated with the project, whilst a third had two active African researchers. The higher proportion of African researchers is expected, given that most projects had more than one African university partner.

Figure 4: Number of active researchers per project by continent



PRDF grant holders report that the AAUN has been successful in enabling the establishment of long-term collaborations with researchers and/or research teams in Africa and Australia. The vast majority (87%) of PRDF grant holders indicated that the AAUN grants enabled them to establish long-term collaborations, and for 40% of researchers, the AAUN played a significant role in this regard. This finding is substantiated further by the fact that more than 80% of grant holders whose projects have been completed continued to collaborate on research after their grants.

The extent to which Steering Group members believed the AAUN had been effective in *creating opportunities for researchers from their institutions to participate in collaborative research* differed widely between respondents – with equal proportions indicating highly effective (40%), moderately effective (20%), only slightly effective (20%) and not in a position to answer (20%).

Sixty percent of responding Steering Group members indicated that the AAUN has been moderately to highly effective at enabling the *establishment of long-term collaboration between researchers and/or research teams* on the two continents. The majority of responding Steering Group members (80%) indicated that the AAUN had been moderately to highly successful in creating a network that facilitates and enables *institutional research partnerships*.

External stakeholders mentioned that the main influence and value of the AAUN was the establishment of networks and collaborations between African and Australian Universities, strengthening all the institutions involved. They noted that these networks and collaborations would not have happened without the AAUN. According to external stakeholders the AAUN is well positioned to make a strategic contribution to establishing equitable partnerships across sectors and continents. One external stakeholder specifically mentioned that because of the strength and reach of the individuals and the institutions involved in the AAUN, they are extremely well positioned to make major strategic contributions with regards to future partnerships and collaborations.

Partnerships with non-AAUN partners

On average, PRDF projects had less than one non-AAUN partner, with 50% having no partners outside the network collaborating on their projects.

Within the group of projects (n=21) with partners outside the network, seven projects had one non-AAUN partner, and 14 projects had more than one non-AAUN partner. Many (15 projects) had non-AAUN Africa based partners, while five had non-AAUN Australia based partners, and five had non-AAUN based partners in Europe.

Non-AAUN partners were predominantly universities, research councils, or other research performing organisations – only four out of the 40 non-AAUN partners were non-academic (community-based or industry partners).

In the African context, non-AAUN partners expanded the reach of the AAUN within country (i.e. included other universities not in the network) but did not expand the country reach significantly (i.e. did not engage with countries outside the network). In the European context, non-AAUN partners expanded the reach of the AAUN to the UK, Switzerland and Denmark, through five projects.

Institutional level partnerships among AAUN members

The vast majority of Steering Group members (80%) indicated they have been successful in establishing new formal institutional level partnerships with other members of the AAUN since joining the network. Forty percent of these institutional level partnerships were with organisations on the same continent, and sixty percent were with organisations on the other continent. In all but one of the cases, the AAUN was attributed with playing a high to moderately high role in creating the networks that enabled these partnerships to be formed.

Institutional partnerships focus on a range of activities, including research as well as teaching and learning. Examples include AfREC (situated at the University of Western Australia) and the University of Pretoria who partnered to develop and implement a joint elective for master's students that has facilitated both staff and student exchange. The University of Pretoria and Murdoch University have agreed in principle on a research collaboration on One Health through the Australian National Phenome Centre.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Three-quarters of the PRDF grant holders indicated that their participation in AAUN activities had a significant (18%) or moderate influence (59%) on their teaching and learning approaches, practices, or content.

On the other hand, forty percent of responding Steering Group members said that AAUN activities had a slight influence on teaching and learning activities within their institutions, and a further forty percent indicated a moderate influence.

MOBILITY AND EXCHANGE

FINDING: The AAUN has played an important role in creating opportunities for mobility and exchange between Australia and Africa

Approximately three-quarters of PRDF grant holders indicated in the survey that the AAUN has been moderately to highly successful in creating a platform for cross-continental mobility and networking (with 47% indicating it has been highly successful in this regard). Close to three-quarters of grants had enabled mobility and exchange for Australian researchers to visit African partners, compared to 46% of grants that enabled exchange for African researchers to visit Australian counterparts. Bi-directional mobility was enabled in a third of the grants. [As mentioned by an external stakeholder, the AAUN provided opportunity for South-to-South networking and research collaborations that wouldn't have otherwise existed.](#)

PRDF grant reports provided details of 47 exchanges reported across 18 projects, including 19 exchanges of Australian researchers to Africa, 15 intra-African exchanges and five exchanges of African researchers to Australia. Most projects had either one or two exchanges, although two projects had as many as eight exchanges each. The duration of the exchanges varied from 1-2 days for short-term visits to a two-month exchange for one project. On average exchanges were eight days long. Across the 47 visits, research teams spent at least 343 days participating in mobility and exchange visits associated with the AAUN grants. This is most certainly an underestimation of the total number of days due to several projects where the number of days was not reported. Although AAUN funding did not cover the costs of all these exchanges, at minimum 223 of the days were attributed to the contribution of AAUN (again, this is an underestimation given inconsistencies in reporting).

While 60% of Steering Group members indicated that the AAUN has been highly successful in creating a platform for mobility and exchange, a further 40% indicated that the AAUN has only been slightly successful in this regard.

CAPACITY BUILDING

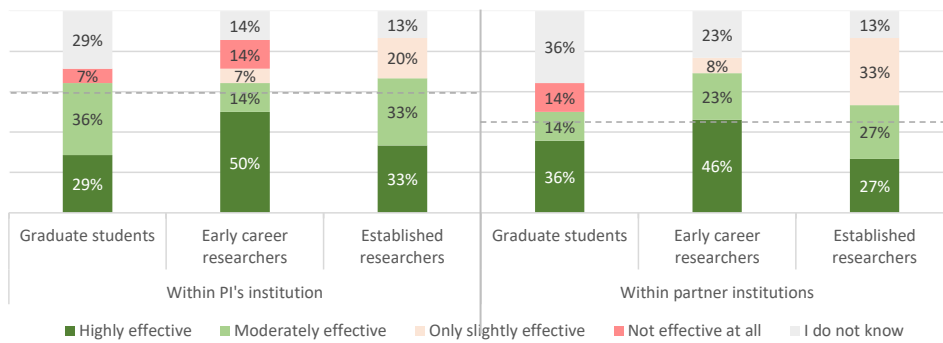
FINDING: AAUN PRDF grants help build capacities within research teams at multiple levels

Approximately two-thirds of principal investigators consider the PRDF grants highly to moderately effective in creating opportunities for building research capacity within their institutions – and specifically, half of the

principal investigators consider the grants highly effective in helping develop the capacity of early career researchers (see Figure 5).

Regarding capacity building at partner institutions, principal investigators considered the PRDF grants to be most effective in creating opportunities for early career researchers – 46% indicated they were highly effective, and 23% indicated they were moderately effective for this purpose. However, a lower proportion (50%) indicated that the grants were highly or moderately effective for building the capacities of graduate students or established researchers (see Figure 5).

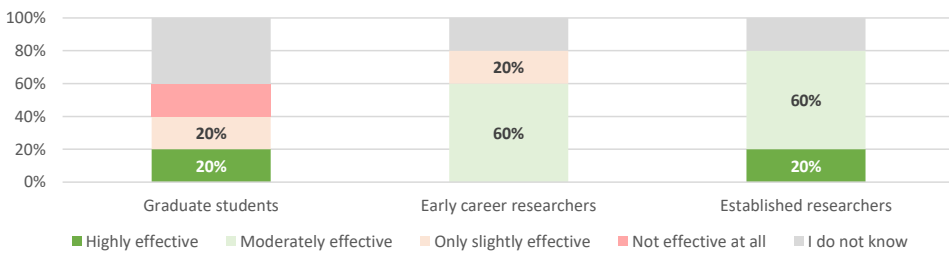
Figure 5: Principle Investigator perspective: Effectiveness of PRDF in creating opportunities for building capacities



Examples from South Africa show how the PRDF grants have been a catalyst for individual researchers to build their research profile and leverage significant additional funding at a national level.

The majority of Steering Group members (80%) indicated that the AAUN has been moderately to highly effective in creating opportunities for building the capacities of established researchers. Sixty percent indicated the network was highly to moderately effective in building the capacities of early career researchers. However, only 20% indicated that AAUN has been effective in creating these opportunities for graduate students.

Figure 6: Steering Group member perspective: Effectiveness of AAUN in creating opportunities for building capacities

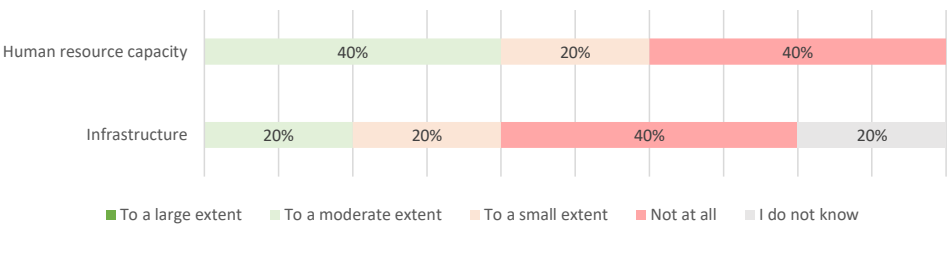


Equal proportions of institutional representatives indicated that the AAUN has been moderately effective, or not effective at all (40% each) in creating opportunities for building institutional leadership capacity. The remaining 20% indicated that they did not know if the AAUN had been effective in this regard or not.

CATALYST FOR RESOURCES AND FUNDING

A low proportion of Steering Group members (20%) indicated that the AAUN had assisted their organisations to leverage infrastructure capacity through its collaborative activities and networks, and 40% indicated they had leveraged human resource capacity (see Figure 7). In contrast, all indicated they had successfully collaborated with other AAUN members to raise funds for collaborative research jointly.

Figure 7: Effectiveness of AAUN for leveraging additional resources



FINDING: PRDF seed grants have enabled several cross-continental research teams to leverage additional funding

Up to half of the current and former PRDF grant holders had either submitted proposals for additional funding or intended to do so in the future. Data from the survey and grant reports suggest that at least 25% of PRDF grant holders have been successful in additional funding applications, with a limited number of projects securing additional funding from 2-3 additional sources.

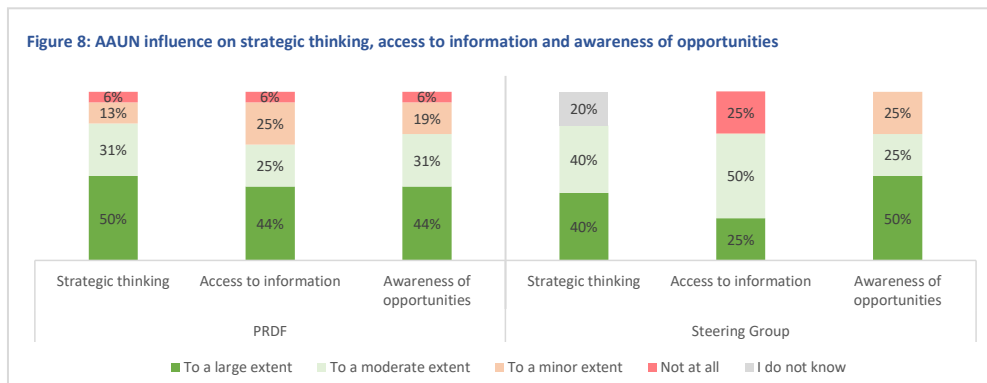
Catalysed by their AAUN collaboration, PRDF researchers have raised additional amounts of AUD 830,680 for research, collaboration and exchange activities³⁴.

INFLUENCE

FINDING: Membership and participation in AAUN activities had a positive impact on strategically positioning Africa-Australia relations

The majority of survey respondents (grant holders and Steering Group members) indicated that participation in AAUN activities improved their institutions/their own strategic thinking, access to information, and awareness about Africa-Australia relations (see Figure 8).

³ At minimum based on available data, not all reports included financial data related to their additional grants.
⁴ The degree to which AAUN collaboration contributed varies between projects and is not clearly determinable in all cases based on current data



Beyond influencing strategic thinking about Australia-Africa relations, institutional embeddedness is also important to consider – in other words, the role that AAUN has played in institutionalising Australia-Africa relations into the strategic agenda of institutions. Institutional centres or institutes are one mechanism which can be highly effective in achieving this. Serving as a central point for coordination within an institution on all matters related to Australia-Africa relations, they can play an important role in escalating the profile and visibility of AAUN activities within an institution and provide capacity within an institution to engage actively in AAUN activities. They also offer the network a strong platform from which to expand its reach and partnerships. There are already examples within the AAUN membership of Africa-related centres – including the Centre for African Research, Engagement and Partnerships (CARE-P) at the University of Newcastle, and the African Research and Engagement Centre (AfREC) at the University of Western Australia. The latter has a long-standing partnership with AAUN to host the Australian Annual Forum.

"My headline point would be that the AAUN has made an extraordinarily valuable contribution to Australian African knowledge partnership. It's diversity and practical application has been outstanding and it has made as a result a major contribution to development in Africa despite very modest funding." – External Stakeholder

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IMPACT OUTSIDE ACADEMIA

Two-thirds of Steering Group members indicated that the AAUN has been successful to some extent in (33% said highly successful and 33% said moderately successful) establishing itself as a trusted source of knowledge and influential voice that informs/advises those in industry, government, and civil society around critical issues affecting Africa and Australia. Several interviewees felt that the network had been successful, at least to some extent, in bridging relationships between Africa and Australia. The networks link through the Australian Annual Forum to the annual Africa Down Under Week in Australia is one example of an ongoing connection to policymakers and industry. The regular participation of AAUN in the Africa Down Under Week demonstrates this established link and relationship.

In 47% of cases, PRDF researchers were aware of how activities undertaken, or knowledge produced, through PRDF grant had an influence or impact (or has the potential for influence and impact) outside of academia. Examples in the area of agriculture included the sharing and uptake of improved postharvest practices and dairy management practices for small cooperatives.

The data gathered through the assessment was not detailed enough to describe in-depth, and provide supporting evidence of, impact outside academia. However, this impact is an important aspect to explore in greater detail – possibly through an external assessment or evaluation process.

AAUN SECRETARIAT

FINDING: The AAUN Secretariat has built positive rapport and strong relationships with members and grant holders

The AAUN Secretariat has invested significant energy in building strong relationships, equitable partnerships and rapport among members. Efforts in this regard have yielded positive results. Steering Group members and grant holders widely view the Secretariat as supportive and user-friendly. The vast majority of grant holders (82%) indicated that the Secretariat has been supportive and user-friendly, and all the Steering Group members indicated that the Secretariat has been supportive and user-friendly (60% to a very large extent, 40% to a large extent).

Respondents were asked in a qualitative question how the Secretariat could improve the support it provided. The only suggestions provided focussed on finding ways to increase access to funding opportunities.

"Facilitate access to funding sources in Australia"

"Circulate information about funding opportunities that would enable further collaboration. Consider extensions to existing projects - i.e. further development on the same theme - rather than requiring a completely new project for a new application."

"Create ongoing relationships with external funding bodies (globally) that AAUN researchers can tap into for follow on projects."

SUCCESS FACTORS

The network has consistently invested resources available in activities that are in line with its strategic goals, and with relatively limited funding, achieved several of its strategic goals.

The surveys sought to identify success factors that contributed to the AAUN's achievements to answer the question *"What should the AAUN keep doing?"*

1. Maintain a focus on creating opportunities for mobility. This focus enables institutions and researchers to get to know each other, work together, share resources and build capacities.
2. Host meetings – such as workshops and Forums – that create opportunities for the AAUN community to engage with each other and build relationships.
3. Support research projects that serve as seed grants for building teams that can later apply for larger future research grants.
4. Continue to focus on the SDGs as an overarching framework for guiding the activities and research undertaken by the AAUN.

[A similar question was posed to external stakeholders and the following themes could be highlighted from their response:](#)

1. [Allowing opportunities for researchers to connect and to form groups to do collaborative research.](#)
2. [Increased engagement and partnerships with the private sector.](#)
3. [The use of leadership and knowledge to create collaborations that are beneficial to all involved.](#)

CHALLENGES AND SUGGESTIONS FOR MOVING FORWARD

Survey respondents were asked to share the challenges that they faced. They also reflected on suggestions for overcoming the challenges faced, in essence to answer the question "What should AAUN start or stop doing?" The key challenges, and suggestions provided to address these, are summarised thematically below.

Collaboration across time zones presents some challenges and requires careful planning and coordination. Sydney and Accra, for example, have an eleven-hour time difference. In addition, levels of access to technologies that facilitate collaboration across continents vary between partners and can present challenges to project implementation.

The fact that PRDF grants are seed grants means that it is important to manage expectations around what can be done with the funds that are available. Grant holders should be prudent and not to over-represent what they can achieve in applications, and the AAUN should be realistic in terms of what is expected as immediate outcomes from the projects. Grant holders who can supplement their PRDF grants with additional institutional or other funding can achieve more in their grants, but not all have immediate access to such funding sources. Suggestions from grant holders included increasing the value of the grants, perhaps through having fewer grants with larger amounts of funding. Opportunities and mechanisms for linking PRDF grant holders to industry and business could be explored further to promote the sustainability of projects. This could be facilitated, for example, by setting aside a certain number of PRDF grants for researchers who want to work with industry/business and who can come up with a business plan to support the sustainability of their projects. [It was also suggested by an external stakeholder that fewer projects could be funded so that the projects could run at a larger scale. If specific focus areas could be identified, other funding opportunities could be positioned more strategically.](#)

Other suggestions included for AAUN to promote more active involvement from early career researchers on both continents. An increased emphasis on early career researchers would build on the network's successes in supporting this group of researchers. Support for early career researchers can play a pivotal role in their future academic success, as creating strong networks – specifically internationally – is an important component of an academic career. The AAUN could consider developing a structured capacity building programme for early career researchers that focuses on establishing long-term collaborations between Australian and African researchers through structured research projects mentored by senior researchers in the network. Other options include requiring PRDF grant holders to include at least one early career researcher in their project activities.

Further suggestions were for the Secretariat to provide support in linking teams to relevant organisations and stakeholders, and to not require three universities involved in each project.

COVID-19 has impacted the AAUN activities, including the implementation of the PRDF grants significantly. Data for the assessment was gathered early in 2020 before the full effect of the pandemic became evident, so there are no detailed descriptions of how projects have been impacted. However, significant negative impacts have

included the cancellation of the 2020 Africa Forum, the delay in the finalisation of several ongoing grants, and the delay in starting new PRDF grants awarded in 2020.

LOOKING FORWARD

All Steering Group Members who provided inputs agreed that the new strategic plan captures the ambitions and capacity of the AAUN. They described the Strategic Plan as well-focused, clear, achievable and measurable.

Qualitative feedback on the Strategy included that it was (i) clear, achievable and measurable, (ii) brief, well focused and achievable, (iii) focussed on key challenges for south-south partnerships. Aspects of the Strategy that were commended included the emphasis on the SDGs, and the building of alliances with other networks.

Areas in the Strategy that were noted as requiring further attention included issues related to governance (more specifically responsibilities) and mechanisms for monitoring.

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in widespread disruption in higher education and research networks globally. The knock-on effects will be significant for individual AAUN member organisations, as well as the collective network. Disruption of such a magnitude presents an opportunity for deep strategic reflection. Although this assessment report was always intended to stimulate thinking and strategic decision making, the importance of this is heightened in the current circumstances.

The section below presents strategic choices the AAUN needs to consider in the aftermath of immediate responses to COVID-19. These strategic choices are informed by the survey data and the series of interviews conducted amidst the pandemic. They represent issues where further debate among members may be needed, as opinions and inputs on these topics were divergent rather than convergent between members in the data collection process.

1. What should the AAUN's thematic focus be?

AAUN research fields are currently limited by funding and sponsors but do focus on shared interest areas that contribute to the relevance of the network's research activities.

The survey with members explored if, and what, new areas could be introduced that would be a mutual global challenge, feasible for AAUN, fundable from defined sources, with important national and international impact.

The topic of potential new areas of research was also explored in the qualitative in-depth interviews [as well as in questions raised to external stakeholders](#).

Sentiments were split between those who advocated for sticking with the current themes and those who advocated for exploring new areas. Reasons put forward for continuing with current themes were that the AAUN should not spread itself too thinly but rather try to make an impact in its current themes, and the strategic relevance of the thematic areas to both Africa and Australia (e.g., agriculture).

Potential themes put forward for inclusion were energy, climate change, ocean and marine sciences research (Indian Ocean related and food security in the context of oceans), as well as a stronger focus on social sciences and humanities. If new research themes were to be adopted, these should focus on strategically important issues relevant to both Australia and Africa.

An expansion in the thematic focus of AAUN activities will require a concerted effort to mobilise resources from a more diverse funding base.

2. How can the AAUN promote active participation among members?

Members who are more actively engaged in the network benefit more from their membership. This raises the question about what can be done to promote active participation from all members.

Although there is an Australian and an African Secretariat, not all members on either continent engage equally in network activities. As noted in the findings, institutional entities with a mandate to focus on Africa-Australia matters can make a significant contribution to institutionalising the network and encouraging active participation at all levels (management and researchers). There should, at minimum, be an institutional contact person at each member institution – a dedicated (part-time) capacity who can coordinate the network's activities at an institutional level and work toward embedding the activities of the network into the institution. This, however, requires a commitment of capacity and has resource implications. It is important to ensure a dedicated capacity to commit significant time to support and coordinate the networks activities in their context within the two secretariats.

Although there is no straightforward solution to increasing active engagement, the network needs to reflect on it.

3. How can the AAUN achieve impact at scale?

COVID-19 will likely bring about a decrease in available funding and an increased focus on impact outside the academic realm. AAUN has a strategic opportunity to reflect on its focus and activities within this context.

PRDF grants have been successful in many respects; however, whether the AAUN should consider undertaking a limited number of larger-scale projects was raised. Although this would require significant funding, it could create opportunities for embedding collaborations between members at the network level (rather than only at the level of bi-lateral partnerships) or alternatively bringing together clusters of members who have a particular interest in a given area. These larger-scale projects of shared mutual interest and benefit could focus on various activities, including research and/or teaching. These projects have a high potential for strategic coordination at the network level, which creates opportunities for more significant impact. The SDGs could be a valuable framework for focussing these types of projects, and clusters of universities could work together on focussed collaborations on specific topics.

As a vehicle for impact, these projects would focus on real-world challenges that require significant transdisciplinary approaches and wide collaboration, including with partners outside academia. Partnerships with industry were mentioned frequently as a vehicle for achieving impact and attracting additional resources and could play an important role in these "mega" projects.

AAUN could consider developing a funding strategy as a mechanism to leverage the resources that would be needed to undertake these types of activities. Some efforts are already underway to achieve this.

4. How can AAUN remain strategic in its expansion?

The AAUN plans to carefully expand its membership in Africa and Australia and expand membership to a limited number of global partners. Although feedback in the assessment process did not raise immediate objections to the expansion, a few key issues were raised.

The pace of expansion was frequently mentioned, specifically that the network should not expand too rapidly, and it should remain relatively small.

Importantly, the expansion of members should not lead to the dilution of the uniqueness of the AAUN. In particular, global partners who join the network should have a vested interest in the linkages between Australia and Africa and understand that this focus is a defining feature of the network. AAUN risks becoming "*just another global network*" if this focus becomes too diluted.

CONCLUSION

The assessment has demonstrated several of the AAUN's key achievements since its inception. The AAUN has several notable successes in line with its strategic plan that have been accomplished with the relatively limited funding available.

The AAUN is unique in its focus and its operational modalities that have enabled it to create a platform for the development of equal partnerships.

The AAUN has played an important role in creating opportunities for mobility and exchange, and is a significant enabler for cross-continental and intra-continental collaboration. Short-term opportunities for collaboration, made possible by AAUN, have led to longer-term collaborations among research teams. At institutional level, several AAUN members have been successful in establishing new formal institutional level partnerships with other members of the AAUN since joining the network.

The PRDF seed grants have yielded several benefits for grant holders, and almost all are satisfied with their overall experience as a grant holder. This network funded research has been widely published and presented on academic and non-academic platforms in both Australia and Africa. Several outputs have already been published, and many more are in progress. Several teams who continued their collaboration after the grants have been able to secure additional funding to build on their work. The PRDF grants have helped build capacities within research teams at multiple levels across institutional partners, and have been particularly effective in helping build the capacity of early career researchers.

For member institutions, participation in AAUN had a positive impact on strategically positioning Africa-Australia relations within their institutions – improving strategic thinking, access to information, and awareness about Africa-Australia relations.

Moving forward, the AAUN should build on its early successes – retaining its unique focus and ensuring continued relevance. Four key strategic questions for moving forward have emerged from the assessment: how to relevant in its focus, how to promote active engagement of all members, how to ensure/scale impact, and how to remain strategic in expansion. These issues should receive attention from the network as it embarks on its next strategic phase.

APPENDIX A – MATRIX OF KEY QUESTIONS AND APPROACH

MATRIX OF KEY QUESTIONS AND APPROACH

The assessment incorporates and seeks to answer the assessment questions from three perspectives: the collective (in other words the network), the institutional (in other words individual members), and the researcher (PRDF grant recipients).

The five areas, with their associated sub-areas (assessment questions) are presented below. For each sub-area (assessment question) the sources of evidence are indicated in the matrix. The matrix for each area thus provides an overview of what the scope of each survey and/or interview protocol could include.

Profile and visibility

Broadly the area of profile and visibility addresses the second assessment purpose *"What is the research profile of the AAUN members?"*

Key questions ⁵	Source of evidence
What is the network's research profile, i.e. what are the areas of shared research focus and strength among members?	<p>Bibliometric analysis of member research strengths. Specifically, profile would be developed that details the following for each member:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • numbers of WOS indexed publications over past 5 years; • list of the most common research areas with performance metrics (from Incites); • list of the most common institutional collaborators (from Incites); and • collaboration with AAUN members not from the same continent (from Incites).
To what extent has the AAUN achieved its objective of becoming an influential voice in policy making across the critical issues affecting Australia and Africa?	<p>Survey question for Steering Group.</p> <p>Interviews with Steering Group and Secretariat members.</p>
What is the profile and visibility of research produced by AAUN PRDF grants?	<p>Bibliometric analysis of published research work emanating from PRDF grants.⁶</p> <p>One-on-one interviews with researchers whose survey responses suggest research has a high profile or who have had policy/industry impact.</p>

⁵ The questions as they are phrased in the key questions list are not a direct reflection of how the question would be phrased in a survey or interview. More nuanced questions will be drafted upon the final selection of the key questions.

⁶ This analysis will be dependent on the availability of data obtained from PRDF grant reports and survey responses. The limited number of publications citing AAUN support restricts the scope of what can be analysed using bibliometric data sources.

Relevance

Broadly the area of relevance addresses the question of "Does the AAUN have the right focus in its strategy and portfolio of activities"? The question will be considered by reflecting on the perspectives of its members on its relevance to their institutions and the voices of the researchers the network has funded. The area of relevance primarily addresses the third assessment purpose related to future strategic directions.

Key questions	Source of evidence
To what extent and in what ways are AAUN's priority areas and focus relevant to the member institutions? What are members' 3 top priorities for AAUN progressing to the future to ensure continued relevance?	Survey question for Steering Group, complemented through focus group and interviews
To what extent and in what ways are AAUN's offerings and activities in line with those that researchers within member institutions need or are interested in?	Survey question to PRDF recipients

Efficiency

The broad area of efficiency seeks to answer the question of whether the AAUN has enabled the efficient use of resources (human, financial and/or infrastructure), allowing more to be accomplished through the network than would have been accomplished by single institutions? The area of efficiency is linked to the first listed purpose of the assessment, namely the AAUN's achievements.

Key questions	Source of evidence
Is the relationship between input of resources (human financial or infrastructure) invested by the network and results achieved by the network as a collective appropriate and justifiable?	Interviews with Steering Group and Secretariat members.
Is the relationship between input of resources (human financial or infrastructure) invested by the institution and results achieved appropriate and justifiable?	Survey question for Steering Group and interviews with Steering Group members.
Is the relationship between research grant size and results achieved appropriate and justifiable?	Interviews, but also to be assessed based on the results from the survey among grant recipients. For example, ratio of publications to grants, non-academic publications to grants or conference presentations to grants could be indications here.

<p>To what extent have PRDF grants been leveraged to obtain further funding for research that is directly aligned to (or builds on) the PRDF grants?</p> <p>What is the direct return on investment for PRDF grants, and have they proven to be sustainable?⁷</p>	<p>Survey question with PRDF grant holders will explore the amount of additional funding leveraged, the sources of the additional funding (research grants; government funding; industry; philanthropy/ NGO funding) and the extent to which the PRDF grant was catalytic in the researchers being able to obtain further funding.</p> <p>Using these data points, we will determine the average amount of funding leveraged per AUS Dollar invested and describe the extent to which AAUN has been the catalyst for the leveraging of these funds.</p>
<p>Have members within the AAUN (who established a connection through the network) jointly applied for research funding to support additional or new collaborative activities?</p>	<p>Survey question for Steering Group will explore the amount of additional funding leveraged, the sources of the additional funding (research grants; government funding; industry; philanthropy/ NGO funding) and the broad areas for the collaboration.</p>

Effectiveness

The broad area of effectiveness looks at short-term outputs and immediate outcomes that have come about as a result of the network's activities and investments. Effectiveness is the first step along the pathway impact and change brought about through the AAUN's activities (the latter are explored in the section below). Effectiveness and impact address the overarching issue of what AAUN has achieved in line with its most recent Strategy⁸.

COLLECTIVE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE NETWORK

The questions below are intended to address the issue of the effectiveness of the network as a collective, rather than the individual benefits membership has brought to specific institutions.

Key questions	Source of evidence
<p>To what extent, and in what ways, has the AAUN been successful in creating a network that facilitates and enables institutional research partnerships among its members?</p>	<p>Survey question for Steering Group</p> <p>Interviews with Steering Group and Secretariat members.</p>
<p>To what extent, and in what ways, has the AAUN been successful in strengthening the academic and leadership capacity of its members?</p>	<p>Survey question for Steering Group</p> <p>Interviews with Steering Group and Secretariat members.</p>
<p>To what extent has the AAUN been successful in creating a platform for cross-continental mobility and networking?</p>	<p>Survey question for Steering Group</p> <p>Interviews with Steering Group and Secretariat members.</p>

⁷ Grants are awarded using sustainability (including likelihood of future funding) as a one of the criteria.

⁸ On the website this is the 2015-2017 strategy. Unclear if there is a strategy for 2018-2020 available.

To what extent has the AAUN been successful in establishing conditions that enable equal partnerships between members?	Survey question for Steering Group Interviews with Steering Group and Secretariat members.
To what extent has the AAUN been successful in establishing itself as a trusted source of knowledge that informs/advises those in industry, government and civil society?	Survey question for Steering Group Interviews with Steering Group and Secretariat members.
Overall assessment of the effectiveness of the network?	Qualitative survey question on key aspects or activities to focus on under the new strategic plan.

EFFECTIVENESS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE MEMBER INSTITUTIONS

The set of questions below speaks to the achievements of AAUN, but from the very specific angle of what the benefits of membership are to specific institutions. In the focus groups with Steering Group members this set of questions would receive significant attention.

Key questions	Source of evidence
How effective has AAUN been in creating opportunities for researchers <u>from your institution</u> to participate in collaborative research and/or co-produce knowledge across borders?	Survey question for Steering Group to be answered from the perspective of THEIR INSTITUTION – not the network as a whole. If effective, then ask for qualitative info and follow up with interview.
How effective has AAUN been in creating opportunities for building the capacities of the following groups <u>in your institution</u> (i) graduate students, (ii) early career researchers, (iii) established researchers?	Survey question for Steering Group to be answered from the perspective of THEIR INSTITUTION – not the network as a whole. If effective, then ask for qualitative info and follow up with interview.
How effective has AAUN been in creating opportunities for building <u>your institution's</u> academic and leadership capacities?	Survey question for Steering Group to be answered from the perspective of THEIR INSTITUTION – not the network as a whole. If effective, then ask for qualitative info and follow up with interview.
To what extent has AAUN been effective in creating opportunities <u>for your institutions</u> to establish	Survey question for Steering Group to be answered from the perspective of THEIR INSTITUTION – not the network as a whole.

collaborative, equitable, institutional-level partnership activities with other member universities?	If effective, then ask for qualitative info and follow up with interview. If effective, then ask for qualitative info and follow up with interview.
What is the most significant benefit of membership in AAUN to the institution?	Survey question for Steering Group Qualitative question on what, of all the outcomes and outputs, was most valuable to them.

EFFECTIVENESS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF PRDF SEED GRANT RECIPIENTS

The set of questions below speaks to achievements of the PRDF grant recipients, which then in turn in an indication of what the AAUN's investments have produced. Ultimately, these questions help to further answer the question of what the AAUN has achieved.

Key questions	Source of evidence
KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION AND DISSEMINATION	Bibliometric analysis
What is the scale of joint peer-reviewed publications enabled through AAUN grants?	Survey question posed to PRDF grant recipients Possible document study of the reports submitted.
What other publications (non-peer reviewed or non-academic) have been jointly published about research conducted under AAUN grants?	Survey question posed to PRDF grant recipients Possible document study of the reports submitted.
How frequently, and where, has funded research been presented at academic conferences?	Survey question posed to PRDF grant recipients Possible document study of the reports submitted.
On what other platforms and to what other audiences has AAUN supported research been presented? (will include categories to help identify target audiences such as industry, government etc.)	Survey question posed to PRDF grant recipients Possible document study of the reports submitted.
CAPACITY BUILDING⁹	
To what extent have PI capacities been developed through PRDF (list of types of capacities will be provided)?	Survey question posed to PRDF grant recipients. Possible to explore more detail through selection of interviews.
To what extent PI believes capacities of others developed through PRDF? (list of types of capacities will be provided)	Survey question

⁹ Grants are made using potential to create opportunities as one of the criteria for assessing the proposals. This question relates to Capacity Building, Mobility and Networking as well as long term collaborations allow for the assessment to reflect on the extent to which these opportunities have indeed been created through the grants.

with space to specify who was developed possibly with indication of career phase and/gender)	Possible to explore more detail through selection of interviews.
MOBILITY AND NETWORKING	
Number of institutions actively involved in the project	Survey question
Number of researchers actively involved in the project	Possible document study of the reports submitted.
Number of exchange visits during PRDF (for PI and/or for students linked to PI)	
LONG-TERM COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIPS	
What are the future plans for the project?	Survey question (this could either be multi-choice dropdown list or free text).
BENEFIT TO RESEARCHER	
Overall assessment of the benefit of the PRDF grant to researcher in terms of their career development?	Survey question. Qualitative question on what, of all the outcomes and outputs, and was most valuable to them

Impact and change as a result of AAUN

The key area related to impact and change enabled through the AAUN seeks to identify changes that have come about beyond immediate outputs and outcomes, as well as impacts and changes beyond the academic sphere. The depth at which this can be explored is limited to some extent as this is not an impact evaluation per se, but results from the assessment will give (at the very least) an indication of the types of impact emerging that could possibly be explored in greater depth at a later stage through a more targeted impact evaluation.

Key questions	Source of evidence
COLLABORATION	
To what extent has the AAUN enabled long-term collaborations between researchers and/research teams on the two continents to be established?	Survey question to Steering Group members and PRDF grant recipients.
Assessment of whether these partnerships would be considered equitable (may need to provide a definition)	Possible follow-up in interviews with both of the above groups.
KNOWLEDGE UPTAKE AND USE	
Has research funded through PRDF grants has been taken up and implemented outside of the academic sphere? ¹⁰	Survey question for PRDF grant recipients.

¹⁰ Grants are made using potential for impact and influence as one of the criteria for assessing the proposals. This question allows the assessment to reflect on whether grant holders have been able to capitalise on the opportunities identified at the time of providing funding.

What changes or impacts are there as a result of this?	Possible follow-up in interview
Have activities undertaken, or knowledge produced, under the auspices of the AAUN had an impact/influence on policy in industry, government and/or civil society?	Survey question for Steering Group and interviews with Steering Group and Secretariat members.
If AAUN did not exist, what positive changes or impacts would not have occurred? ¹¹	Survey question for Steering Group. Interviews with Steering Group and Secretariat members.

Sustainability of the AAUN and strategic direction

A final qualitative question in the survey for the Steering Group, and for interviews will focus on the sustainability of the AAUN – is the AAUN sustainable in its current form? If yes, what are the key characteristics of the network and its modalities that position it for success and sustainability (in other words, what should AAUN keep doing)? If not, what key changes will be required moving forward to ensure its sustainability (in other words, what should AAUN stop doing).

¹¹ Known as the counterfactual question – the answers to this question provide further insights into the areas where the network has been particularly influential and instrumental in bringing about changes.

APPENDIX B – INPUTS FROM EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

Question 1. Based on your knowledge and engagement with the AAUN, what is the main influence and value of the network in terms of its contribution to Australia-Africa relations? What do you believe would not have happened without the activities of the AAUN?

<p>The AAUN is a distinctive and unique model of a south-south network that has generated new research collaborations between African and Australian universities that would not have happened without the AAUN. It has shown that by bringing different perspectives to what may seem [to be] intractable problems, much more can be learned.</p>	<p>Prof. Cheryl de la Rey, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Canterbury (New Zealand)</p>
<p>Main influence and value have been in building research partnerships between leading Australian and African academic institutions, to the benefit of both continents. This has developed a remarkable personal as well as institutional network, which particularly supports and strengthens the African institutions involved. I do not believe this would have happened without the AAUN.</p>	<p>HE Ambassador Matthew Neuhaus, Australian Ambassador to the Kingdom of the Netherlands</p>
<p>AAUN played an extremely valuable role in connecting African and Australian Universities. This would not have happened without the great networking abilities and passion by the AAUN Team.</p>	<p>HE Ambassador Isiaya Kabira, Kenya High Commissioner to Australia</p>
<p>The main influence certainly is that it breaks the isolation of a place like Australia, which has a different geography; they usually engage from a developing country perspective and Africa who usually works North-to-North. So, it's quite unique that these two continents ... work together in higher education, and research.</p> <p>The second aspect is that it strengthens research partnerships, especially from an Australian perspective, who want to do development work in Africa, but who [have] not had the wider network of influence and engagement to do so. And certainly, Africa views, from my perspective, Australia as the last avenue of engagement.</p> <p>So that uniqueness of the two continental perspectives, bringing them together, really places this at a next level of a network, and also it just wouldn't have happened if something like AAUN is not there.</p>	<p>Dr Aldo Stroebel, Executive Director: Strategic Partnerships, National Research Foundation (South Africa)</p>
<p>A group that brings together academics and institutions to deepen the shared understanding on issues relevant to Australia and countries of Africa is one we appreciate. Along with entities such as AfREC, the Australia Africa Chamber of Commerce, and the Australia Africa Minerals and Energy Group, AAUN forms an important part of a broader community in Australia facilitating networks, deepening knowledge, and understanding and enhancing links. At this highest level, for role of the network is therefore one that adds value.</p> <p>We're struck, when reflecting on the output of the network of the quantity and scope of [the PRDF] projects, that this output is the key strength of the network. It's something that AAUN – and potentially DFAT and our diplomatic posts - could leverage more than is currently the case. It would be valuable to think of relatively easy ways of</p>	<p>Alison Chartres, Assistant Secretary Africa Branch, Middle East and Africa Division, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia)</p>

getting that information up on relevant websites or sharing communications with our teams on a regular basis.

Question 2. From your perspective, how well is the AAUN positioned to make a strategic contribution to establishing equal partnerships across sectors and continents, conducting research on global challenges, enabling early career researchers – women and men, and facilitating impact outside the academic sphere?

Very well-positioned as the AAUN has a track record of demonstrable achievements that are a foundation for future expansion. The principle of equal partnership has worked well and should be used more widely.

Prof. Cheryl de la Rey, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Canterbury, New Zealand

Given the strength and reach of the institutions and individuals involved, the AAUN is extremely well placed to make a major strategic contribution to building further partnerships and collaboration. Given the existing programs (which are very practically oriented) and strong links with the Australia Africa Awards and ACIAR this has great promise – including in addressing important issues of food security, climate change impact, health and resilience. It has been a great encouragement to junior researchers, both men and women, and has a lot of potential to work more closely with the private sector.

HE Ambassador Matthew Neuhaus, Australian Ambassador to the Kingdom of the Netherlands

AAUN is very well positioned to bring together researchers and academics from the two continents. There is a proven track record of this from previous engagements.

HE Ambassador Isiaya Kabira, Kenya High Commissioner to Australia

The strategic contribution to equality in partnerships - one has really seen effort by the Australian partners to bring this on an equal footage. And it is very unlike many of the [examples from other geographic regions] where there is not equality in the partnership modality.

The next aspect of this is specifically great opportunities that Australia brings with its own networks to focus on early career researchers, woman and men.

Dr Aldo Stroebel, Executive Director: Strategic Partnerships, National Research Foundation (South Africa)

Question 3. What are the AAUN's strengths, and what should it continue doing in the next five years?

Connecting researchers with different perspectives to form research groups that tackle the SDGs.

The research grants that act as catalytic/start-up funds have been a huge success.

Prof. Cheryl de la Rey, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Canterbury (New Zealand)

One of AAUN's strengths has been the way it has been positioning itself over the years to engage more with the private sector. I saw this in the past for example in its annual engagement with Africa Downunder/ Australia Africa Week events in Perth.

HE Ambassador Matthew Neuhaus, Australian Ambassador to the Kingdom of the Netherlands

The biggest strength of the AAUN is the great local knowledge that they possess on the opportunities and challenges of Africa. They have proven capable of getting the right thought leaders to dissect how best Africa and Australian Universities can collaborate and create mutual benefits.

HE Ambassador Isiaya Kabira, Kenya High Commissioner to Australia

Number one, exactly what it is doing. The next one is to focus on larger global science initiatives. I would very much like to see a cohort PhD training model between Africa and Australia, where there's dedicated groups of PhD researchers that can engage on both continents so they get an exposure. One of the suggestions could be fewer projects that you fund but much larger in scope, so that there's really consortia working together. But really focusing on the consortia PhD training initiatives on critical questions.

Dr Aldo Stroebel, Executive Director: Strategic Partnerships, National Research Foundation (South Africa)

Question 4. How can the impact and influence of the AAUN be strengthened for the next 5 years?

Further south-south expansion should be considered, especially in the area of climate change and sustainability where the regions in the south are facing similar challenges. The AAUN could also have closer linkages with other networks with similar objectives.

Prof. Cheryl de la Rey, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Canterbury (New Zealand)

I would like to see [private sector engagement] build more in coming five years. Regrettably Australian business or its mining industry has not been particularly academically or research minded. However there are a lot of synergies to be developed here.

HE Ambassador Matthew Neuhaus, Australian Ambassador to the Kingdom of the Netherlands

One outstanding example is the work of Fortescue Future Industries as it addresses the global climate challenge and the development of hydrogen and renewable energy. I would like to see more of a partnership with business institutions like FFI and in particular Andrew Forrest and Malcolm Turnbull on what the AAUN and its research activities and networks has to offer in this space.

AAUN should be supported to mobilize enough funds that can be extended in the area of research.

HE Ambassador Isiaya Kabira, Kenya High Commissioner to Australia

I would like to see a bigger proportion of women PI's. This would be one of my strategic pointers that you enable the research frameworks to be extremely focused and almost exclusionary, to be much more inclusive of early career researchers to collaborate, and then especially women. This will send a strong signal to make the partnership stronger.

Dr Aldo Stroebel, Executive Director: Strategic Partnerships, National Research Foundation (South Africa)

I think a more dedicated marketing, communication positioning type of approach will be necessary

We would recommend refinement of the Network's strategic focus. You might think about how Indo-Pacific links might enhance the work of the AAUN. How can your work in Africa amplify and support Australia's clear Indo-Pacific interests? A couple of areas you might explore:

Alison Chartres, Assistant Secretary Africa Branch, Middle East and Africa Division, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia)

- Consider strategic partnerships with those who care about Africa (that also care about in the Indo-Pacific – esp. India, Japan, France, UK, US). An example of this is the French Government's Interreg program (via Reunion Island) which funds (in the millions of euros) research projects across the Western Indian Ocean, often in partnership with Australian universities. Everyone wins – good research is

happening, partnerships are being fostered between Africa/Australia (which is what AAUN seeks), and it also sends useful messages to our likeminded partners.

- Prioritise research in areas that really count for Africa: in particular at this juncture - climate change, renewable energy, agriculture, water, blue economy, mining. For example, why not a renewable energy partnership somewhere in southern Africa, with an Australian researcher, and Indian research partner or supplier?

Question 5. What are the strategic opportunities within the broader environment, within which you and your organisation are positioned, that the AAUN should be aware of?

The growing awareness and urgency around the SDGs especially climate change. Another area is disaster management, risk and resilience.	Prof. Cheryl de la Rey, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Canterbury (New Zealand)
A possible collaboration I would draw attention to is with the Global Climate Adaptation Centre in Rotterdam which has considerable interest in and engagement with Africa, and growing engagement with Australia and the Pacific.	HE Ambassador Matthew Neuhaus, Australian Ambassador to the Kingdom of the Netherlands
AAUN should continue collaborating with African universities like the University of Nairobi that has become a lead research institution in Africa.	HE Ambassador Isiaya Kabira, Kenya High Commissioner to Australia
We're also very interested in how partnerships might be developed beyond 'non-traditional' partners. How might AAUN as a collective, or individual partners, build deeper links with NGOs, international organisations, companies etc? Not only are they potential funders, but they also offer opportunities for collaboration on projects that make the jump from research to practical activities and impact.	Alison Chartres, Assistant Secretary Africa Branch, Middle East and Africa Division, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia)

Question 6. Is there anything else that you would like to share, or any other comments you have, that is of relevance to the assessment?

For a network that had small beginnings, the AAUN has produced meaningful and tangible outcomes that should be seen as a foundation for further expansion.	Prof. Cheryl de la Rey, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Canterbury (New Zealand)
My headline point would be that the AAUN has made an extraordinarily valuable contribution to Australian African knowledge partnership. It's diversity and practical application has been outstanding, and it has made as a result a major contribution to development in Africa despite very modest funding. It has sat very well alongside the Australia Africa Awards which have been a lynchpin of our official development engagement with Africa.	HE Ambassador Matthew Neuhaus, Australian Ambassador to the Kingdom of the Netherlands
I commend the great passion and commitment that the AAUN team. I recommend continued support for their work.	HE Ambassador Isiaya Kabira, Kenya High Commissioner to Australia

[We should try to] institutionalize the research of the AAUN network within each of the participating country's science granting councils. In Africa there is the Science Granting Councils Initiative (SGCI) – this could be a very important opportunity for the SGCI.

The ARC in Australia has always been a challenge because it doesn't really fund international work. But you can very easily take a Belmont forum type of model where it is a consortium of funders working together, but they keep their funding in their own countries for their own researchers. And this could be a model I think that could entice the ARC to be much more open, much more facilitative in supporting continental research. Of course, focusing within their own national structures, but advancing the collaborative type of work.

[There should be a focus on] engaging and positioning AAUN in the larger global science network. From a positioning perspective, the AAUN as a concept is an opportunity for cross border collaboration, [and there is an opportunity] to strengthen that within the global science networks, and to really market AAUN accordingly. The AAUN could consider consortia to participate in.

AAUN should potentially fund fewer projects but at a larger scale and then of course the consortia PhD training model but be very specific on research focus areas or areas of inquiry One of the focus areas could be an open area and anyone can apply, whatever their interest is. But the focus approach on in areas which are globally recognized, which has crosscutters of capacity, woman researchers, and PhD cohort training. That will really enable the process to go forward.

Dr Aldo Stroebel, Executive Director: Strategic Partnerships, National Research Foundation (South Africa)