



Association of African Universities Association des Universités Africaines

اتحاد الجامعات الافريقية

AAU e-Courier

Issue 30

February 2006

AAU e-Courier...AAU e-Courier...AAU e-Courier...AAU e-Courier...AAU e-Courier

Past Issues

An electronic update on Higher Education events, services and products

In This Issue

AAU ACTIVITIES

AAU Activities

1. Second African Union Meeting of Experts
2. AAU Staff Retreat
3. IFP Holds Cohort Meeting

UNDP/GSI/AAS Workshop on the Global Science Corps, 16th to 17th January 2006, Nairobi, Kenya

A two-day workshop was held at the Hilton Hotel, Nairobi, from January 16 - 17, 2006 to discuss the concept of the Global Science Corp (GSC), a new initiative intended to boost the quality of scientific research and training in Africa and how it should be implemented.

The GSC concept is the brainchild of Dr Harold Varmus, a University of California professor and co-recipient of the 1989 Nobel Prize for Medicine or Physiology. Alarmed at the low level of science and technology development in most parts of the developing world and Africa in particular, Dr. Varmus initiated, in a speech he delivered in 2001 to mark the Nobel Prizes centenary in Stockholm, the idea of encouraging eminent retiring scientists in the developed countries to make their vast scientific knowledge available to the developing countries, a concept slightly similar to the Peace Corps programme of the 1960s. The concept of the Global Science Corp (GSC) fellows was born.

About the same time, another international initiative, the Millennium Science Initiative (MSI) with more or less similar objectives (building science and engineering capacity in developing countries) was also underway, spearheaded by the World Bank, UNDP, a partnership of organisations and individuals. It was agreed that the two initiatives should run alongside each other.

The Nairobi workshop was co-sponsored by the African Academy of Science (AAS), as host, the Third World Academy of Science (TWAS) in Trieste, Italy and the UNDP Special Unit for South-South Cooperation. It discussed in detail the relevance and importance of the GSC initiative to scientific capacity building and enhancement in Africa and its eventual contribution to Africa's socio-economic development, particularly in turning brain drain into brain gain. It noted the several similar initiatives that had been implemented in attempts to address Africa's dismal development but which had failed to make any significant impact, and cautioned the GSC to draw from old lessons learnt and develop synergies with other initiatives and institutions involved in research and the promotion of scientific and higher education in Africa. The AAU was named as one of such organisations.

It was pointed out that contrary to popular beliefs, Africa has a large pool of highly intelligent, highly qualified and skilled scientists. They just lacked support, mainly in terms

AAU Participation in External Meetings

AAU in Media

Publications

Announcements/Call for Papers

Calendar

of equipment and an environment conducive to productive work.

Caution was also to be exercised in the implementation of the programme, and in ensuring that the objectives of the GSC were properly aligned with the development priorities of host countries. Donors were strongly advised not to determine the priorities for the GSC nor drive its agenda, as had been the case in many instances. It was also recognised that for Africa to be a serious player in the globalised and knowledge driven economy, it must pay serious attention to the revitalisation of its universities and research institutions.

Participants were drawn from a wide spectrum of scientific training and research institutions such as universities, academies of science in African countries, organisations involved in science and technology initiatives in Africa, associations representing higher education institutions and some of the most eminent African scientists and mathematicians.

At the end of the two-day workshop, participants passed several resolutions and recommendations to ensure the success of the GSC programme in Africa. A GSC programme steering committee whose membership includes the AAU was proposed and agreed.

For more information on the Initiative, please contact the AAU Secretariat at:
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