

Academic Collaboration in Africa,
an information seminar as part of
African University Day celebrations at Stellenbosch University (SU)

Wallenberg Research Centre, STIAS, 12 November 2010

Theme: The Contribution of African University Collaboration
to the Millennium Development Goals

**Welcome and opening address by
Prof Russel Botman, Rector and Vice-Chancellor, SU,
and Vice-President of the Association of African Universities (AAU)**

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. *Goeiemore, alma. Welkom hier. Molweni. Wamkelekile. Habari. Karibu.*

Distinguished guests:

- Representatives from PANGeA partner universities:
 - Prof Byaruhanga Rukooko of Makerere University
 - Prof Happy Siphambe and Dr Leapetswe Maletse of the University of Botswana
 - Prof Bertram Mapunda of the University of Dar es Salaam
 - Prof Enos Njeru of the University of Nairobi; and
 - Dr Regson Chaweza of the University of Malawi
- Guests from the secretariat of Association of African Universities, Ghana:
 - Ms Alida Baeta
 - Ms Joselyn Barnor
- Delegates from the Department of Science and Technology and their programme partners,
- Delegates from the Department of Higher Education and Training
- Delegates and visitors from our partner institutions in the region, the University of the Western Cape, the Cape Peninsula University of Technology and the University of Cape Town
- Prof Hennie Kotzé, Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Stellenbosch University (SU)
- Prof Johann Groenewald, PANGeA Coordinator here at SU
- Colleagues
- Ladies and gentlemen

It is an honour to have all of you here with us this morning at this seminar. It forms part of a very important annual event for us – African University Day (AUD), which is an

initiative of the Association of African Universities, and has been celebrated by Stellenbosch University since its inception.

My role this morning is to welcome all of you, and to say a few words tying in with the theme of your seminar. Thereafter, I will let you get on with your important deliberations.

The theme of the seminar is “The Contribution of African University Collaboration to the Millennium Development Goals”. Now, in April this year, the Association of Commonwealth Universities held its Conference of Executive Heads here at Stellenbosch and UCT, and the theme of that gathering was “Universities and the Millennium Development Goals”. But this seminar today takes the issue further to focus specifically on “collaboration” between universities in Africa.

Why is this important? The one problem we have in Africa is that our rate of higher education participation is very low. Tertiary enrolment is rising faster in Africa than elsewhere, but the number of students entering higher education is just 6% of the eligible age group. Compare this to about 70% and 80% in the developed world, Europe and North America, and it is clear that we have a problem.

So, finding ways of getting more students into universities is one challenge that we have to address. But it is about more than just numbers. Quality also matters, maybe even more than quantity. Africa’s output of research findings amounts to only 0,7% of the global total, which means Africa’s experts are not doing enough to come up with home-grown solutions to Africa’s problems.

To help remedy this problem, Stellenbosch University’s Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences has established a Graduate School to grow and sustain world-class postgraduate programmes, and to coordinate research in Africa that is focused on some of the problems of the continent.

Our Graduate School started functioning in January 2010 with a first cohort of 31 fulltime doctoral students on scholarships, 22 of whom are from outside the borders of South Africa. To fast-track their PHD studies, they receive capacity building at our African Doctoral Academy.

These initiatives form part of Stellenbosch University’s HOPE Project (Stellenbosch University, 2010), which is our way of applying science to address problems in society. It came about when we looked around us, and saw that the political liberation that came with the vote in South Africa in 1994 did not bring freedom from hunger, disease, homelessness, exploitation, corruption, violence, pollution or unemployment. The same goes for the rest of Africa, where uhuru started in Ghana in 1957 and independence

followed in other countries in the 1960s and 70s, but still most people are trapped in poverty to this day.

We realised that as a university it was our duty to use our key strengths – our academic studies and research – to be of service to society. So, we analysed the UN's Millennium Development Goals and our government's strategic development priorities, and distilled five key themes on which to focus our core activities as a university.

We are convinced that if we work to (1) eradicate poverty and related conditions, and promote (2) human dignity and health, (3) democracy and human rights, (4) peace and security; as well as (5) a sustainable environment and a competitive industry, then we will make a meaningful difference.

Across our faculties and management structures, our leaders and researchers and academics and students have developed 22 academic initiatives designed to make a tangible difference where it matters most. For instance, as part of the HOPE Project, we have a Food Security Initiative, a Centre for HIV/Aids Management, a Rural Clinical School aimed at producing more doctors for underserved parts of the country, a Unit for Corporate Governance, a Centre for Dispute Settlement and a Centre for Agribusiness Leadership Development, a Water Institute, as well as various initiatives looking at environmental sustainability.

It is important that we collaborate among ourselves in the higher education sector in Africa. In November 2006, a number of deans of humanities and social science faculties met in Stellenbosch. This resulted in the Partnership for Africa's Next Generation of Academics (PANGeA), a network between Stellenbosch and the universities of Botswana, Dar es Salaam, Makerere, Malawi and Nairobi. Later today, we will be signing a Multilateral Memorandum of Understanding that will formally constitute PANGeA. And in time, this network will hopefully expand and create continent-wide opportunities for academic collaboration.

This is the only way that we realise the promise that the following quotation by Nelson Mandela, the former president of South Africa: He said: "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."

Let us take hands and work together to make this a reality.

Good luck with your deliberations.

Thank you.

REFERENCES

Stellenbosch University. 2010. *The HOPE Project*. Stellenbosch: Stellenbosch University. URL: <http://thehopeproject.co.za/hope/Pages/default.aspx>