



Ushirika wa Maendeleo ya Elimu Barani Afrika  
الرابطة لأجل تطوير التربية في إفريقيا  
Association for the Development of Education in Africa  
Association pour le Développement de l'Éducation en Afrique  
Associação para o Desenvolvimento da Educação em África



## WORKING GROUP ON HIGHER EDUCATION (WGHE) WEBINAR SERIES

### CONCEPT PAPER FOR THE FOURTH WEBINAR ON THE 27<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2016

## REVITALIZING RESEARCH AND INNOVATION TO ADDRESS CONTINENTAL CHALLENGES AND PROMOTE GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS IN AFRICA

### Introduction

Higher education has a critical role to play in delivering the knowledge and skills necessary for the social and economic development of the African continent in the twenty-first century. The rapidly growing African society and the concomitant development challenges increasingly necessitate the urgent need for building a robust and effective higher education system and revitalization of its research and innovation capability in the continent. Research is the powerhouse of knowledge creation. The importance of research, as a powerful tool for knowledge production and innovation, and its central bastion, higher education, have been recently catapulted as we ushered in the knowledge era. To be nationally relevant while globally competitive, countries are increasingly striving to situate research and innovation at the centre of their developmental agenda.

This concept note concisely outlines a number of major challenges in promoting research and innovation in Africa and advances how the continent should strive to overcome these challenges in its effort to advance national development and foster global competitiveness. As a major hub of research and innovation in Africa, this concept paper focuses on higher education institutions.

### Highlights of Major Challenges in Promoting Research and innovation in Africa.

#### Expansion

Africa has demonstrated a phenomenal growth in higher education enrollment in the last decade. Yet still, Sub-Saharan Africa has the least developed and elitist higher education system in the world. The rate of enrollment still stands in a mid-single digit with considerable variation from the lowest in Malawi about 1 percent to South Africa around 20 percent. So far building the higher education system has largely focused on expanding the numbers in knowledge dissemination. The pattern of growth trajectory of the universities in particular and the higher education sector as a whole both in absolute terms as well as in proportions has been however the function of multiple factors including institutional and national policies, in terms of access, funding, and equity as well as international imperatives. This remarkable expansion, however, did not come without attendant challenges in terms



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of quality of teaching and learning, but more so research and innovation. It is no wonder that massification of a system and quality (and excellence) are not mostly on the same course. Expansion may continue unabated and thus inevitable with consequence on quality and excellence of the entire academic endeavor especially research and innovation. It is thus important to reiterate the need for differentiation strategically identifying key institutions and programmes for revitalization though this remains highly contentious.

### **Funding and Financing**

To be sure, research is an expensive enterprise. Establishing, running and maintaining a successful research system entails seasoned researchers, sound infrastructure, state-of-the-art equipment and plentiful consumables. More so, research demands that it be supported without an immediate outcome or visible results and for a long period of time. The knowledge gap among politicians and the public in terms of the cost and need for a sustained support to advance successful research and innovation is considerable. Apportioning quite a small funding cake, among the competing demands of national ministries, requires considerable political will. This entails that politicians and governments are adequately informed on the vital role of research in social, economic, and cultural development and their global competitiveness. While the weak economic and financial state of nations could be attributed to the lackluster funding of research and development, the absence of a robust political and public support remains a hindrance. Africa still continues to trail the world, by big margins, in funding its own research.

It is in recognition of this reality that several calls have been made to African countries to raise research and development commitments to 1% GDP, though this remains elusive. Consequently, Africa's research and innovation are massively and woefully dependent on external sources with implications for its development and competitiveness. According to some estimates, more than 70 percent of research grants in Africa are generated from overseas. All is not that gloom completely, however. For instance, pledges have been made by Kenya and Tanzania to raise the level of their contributions towards research and development. Kenya, in particular, was planning to set up a US\$1 billion National Research Fund to strengthen university research. The government was also seeking to set aside about 2% of GDP for research.



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## Scholarly Publishing

Africa stands at the bottom of almost every knowledge economic indicator. Its institutions contributed 0.7% to the world's scientific literature in 2004 and 0.07% of global patent applications (World Bank Group, 2012). A generous, though arguable statistics puts the literature figure to 1.8% still minuscule in light of the continent's massive social and economic needs. Furthermore, the little knowledge that is generated is not effectively produced either. Publishing research in Africa is all the more complex due to what is largely known as “volume-one-number-one syndrome”, where many journals barely live beyond their maiden issue due to a host of reasons. These include a shortage of publishable materials (manifestation of low-level research), sub-standard quality in content and appearance, irregular appearance, poor editorial capability and support, small community of academics, among others. These challenges diminish the contributions of whatever undertaken research and their impact to development.

## Conclusion

Higher education is an expensive endeavor. Even more so, building strong research and innovation capabilities are costlier and thus necessitates the mobilization of massive resources from a host of stakeholders both institutional, national and international. As issues of climate, health, disease, environment, security, and migration have increasingly taken a global center stage, nations are now in a better position to align their strategic development plans including building their research and innovation capabilities along these broader international development regimes. Contrary to a popular view, research and innovation do not translate into economic boom overnight. They require a host of catalytic forces to make meaningful and visible impact including, but not limited to dependable, “sufficient” and long-term investment; decent facilities (labs, equipment, ICT); seasoned academics; able and stable leadership and management; robust autonomy; strategically agreed themes; innovative delivery approaches; conducive social, economic and political climate; incentivized legal framework for creativity; and successful (inter)national cooperation and partnerships among others.

Join the webinar presentation to explore and learn more about innovative ways to revitalize research to solve problems in Africa and push the continent forward in optimum development.



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## Objectives:

The main objectives of the WGHE Webinar on Revitalizing Research and Innovation to Address Continental Challenges and Promote Global Competitiveness in Africa are to:

- a) Identify major challenges in promoting research and innovation in Africa
- b) Explore innovative ways of revitalizing research to promote global competitiveness.
- c) Discuss best practices for research and innovation in Africa.

## Expected outcomes

The expected outcomes of the webinar are to:

- a) Foster differentiation in strategically identifying key institutions and programmes for revitalization.
- b) Promote the adoption of best research practices and innovations by African researchers and higher education communities.

## Deliverables

The deliverables of the WGHE webinar are:

- a) Presentation on revitalizing research and innovation to address continental challenges and promote global competitiveness in Africa.
- b) Interaction with various participants and stakeholders on the presentation.
- c) Documented lessons from the presentation as well as questions and answer (Q/A) session.



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## INFORMATION ON THE WEBINAR PRESENTATION

**Date:** Thursday, 27<sup>th</sup> October 2016

**Time:** 12:00 GMT

**Venue:** Conference Hall, AAU Office, Airport Residential Area, Accra, Ghana.

**Organizers:** This Webinar is organized by the Association for Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) through its Working Group on Higher Education (WGHE), hosted by the Association of African Universities (AAU).

**Target Audience:** The Webinars are open to all - most especially, Vice- Chancellors, academic staff, board members of AAU , development cooperation partners, the African Union Commission staff, Educational Divisions of the various Regional Economic Communities (RECs), International Education-based NGO's, Ministries of Education, scholars, students, researchers, diaspora, private sector, government officials and others

## HOW TO PARTICIPATE

- 1) Register at [www.aau.org/webinars](http://www.aau.org/webinars)
- 2) Webinar will be streamed live at <https://meet53484183.adobeconnect.com/wghetalks/>
- 3) Make sure you have Adobe flash player installed on your device (computer, phones etc.), if not, please click here: <https://get.adobe.com/flashplayer/>

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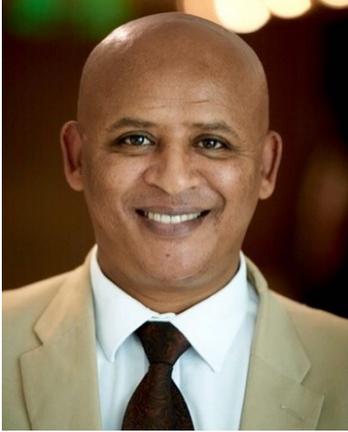
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## WEBINAR PRESENTER



Dr. Damtew Teferra is a Professor of Higher Education and leader of Higher Education Training and Development at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa. He is the founder and director of the International Network for Higher Education in Africa, earlier at the Center for International Higher Education (CIHE), Boston College. He has been with the University of KwaZulu-Natal, for over 10 years now.

Prof. Teferra is the former director for Africa and the Middle East of the Ford Foundation International Fellowships Program in New York. He is the (former) founding Editor-in-Chief of the Journal of African Higher Education (former) and the International Journal of African Higher Education and the Chronicle of African Higher Education. He is the author of Scientific Communication in African Universities: External Assistance and National Needs (Routledge Falmer, 2003) and lead (and sole) editor of the award-winning books.

He has been consulting for and closely working with multiple regional and international organizations including UNESCO, African Union, European Union, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), the German agency for international development cooperation (GIZ), Association of African Universities, Inter-University Council for Eastern Africa, among others. He continues to present at numerous conferences and symposia as keynote speaker, panel member and speaker in Africa, Asia, Europe and North America.