Report: Pathways for Research Uptake

Joint CAAST-Net Plus-DRUSSA Stakeholder Forum

Indaba Hotel, Johannesburg, South Africa

12 May 2015

caast-net-plus.org

Table of contents

Introduction

CAAST-Net Plus is a Framework Programme Seven (FP7[i]) funded project with a consortium of 26 partner organisations from across Europe and sub-Saharan Africa, many of which are national science and technology authorities such as ministries and councils, or their agencies. The project, running from 2013 to 2017, provides a platform for partners to work together in supporting bi-regional cooperation in research and innovation. Building on the results of the former CAAST-Net Project (2008 – 2012), CAAST-Net Plus is aimed at:

- Fostering bi-regional science, technology and innovation (STI) cooperation for enhanced outcomes around topics of mutual interest and particularly in relation to the global societal challenges of climate change, food security and health; and,

- Creating a platform for discussions and dialogues amongst stakeholders in a bid to gather informed opinion and experience about bi-regional cooperation process between Africa and Europe while formulating and disseminating it in such a way as to be admissible to the formal bi-regional STI policy dialogue process and to programme owners.

The South African Government Department of Science and Technology (DST) which has been a key partner in CAAST-Net and CAAST-Net Plus with responsibility for and leading various activities and deliverables within the project. This includes hosting stakeholder forums that bring together representatives from the private and public sector, civil society, academia, government, and other key individuals that seek to effectively address and find solutions to societal challenges.

In partnership with the Development of Research Uptake in sub-Saharan Africa (DRUSSA[ii]) programme, CAAST-Net Plus held a stakeholder forum, at the occasion of the ACU–SARIMA[iii]2015 conference, organised under the theme "*Pathways for Research Uptake[iv]*." The Forum held on 12 May 2015 in Johannesburg, South Africa, served as a second stakeholder forum for CAAST-Net Plus and brought together representatives from business, public sector, policy, academia and funding communities to discuss three key issues:
- Transferring knowledge into solutions – research agendas, challenges, visions and good practices;
- Emerging lessons from the CAAST-Net Plus project and DRUSSA on research uptake; and,
- Building partnerships for research uptake and knowledge transfer.

CAAST-Net Plus and DRUSSA are initiatives that advocate for the use of evidence-based research in addressing societal challenges bi-regionally, in Europe and Africa. Both the DRUSSA and CAAST-Net Plus projects are led by the Association of Commonwealth Universities, which aims to promote excellence in higher education for people and societal advancement in the UK and beyond.

The opportunity to co-host such an event meant that both programmes could bring together key representatives to share ideas, challenges, recommendations and good practices in addressing the challenges that come with research uptake and influencing policy. Recommendations from the discussions can be taken forward by both programmes within their respective networks. Ideas and challenges shared at the workshop could also be absorbed by the various stakeholders in attendance, within their respective fields and/or sectors.

This report highlights some of the characteristics of the current landscape of research uptake within and between European and African research activities, as shared by participants at the Forum. However, they do not represent the views of the project nor do they provide a scrupulous overview of the landscape

Forum Objectives

The forum aimed to explore contemporary issues and emerging lessons for better evidence-based decision making and better uptake of research for innovation in goods, services and technologies for global challenges. The topics below were set to guide the discussions over the course of three sessions:

- Transferring knowledge: research agendas, challenges, and good practices;
- Emerging lessons from CAAST-Net Plus and DRUSSA in the uptake of research; and,
- Building partnerships for research uptake and knowledge transfer.

The discussions mainly focussed on the current landscape of research uptake in EU-Africa research activities, challenges, and potential modalities in the effective use of research results for development.

Pathways for Research Uptake

As it stands, there are various research initiatives existing in and between European and African countries that aim to address societal challenges such as health, food security, education, poverty, climate change and so forth. However, policy-makers are finding it difficult to connect with researchers and academics in formulating policies that effectively address regional and bi-regional challenges.

Transferring knowledge – research agendas, challenges and good practices

Challenges and barriers in the uptake of research include, but are not limited to funding, mobility, unequal capacity, low market returns, lack of incentives for researchers, skills gaps, weak policy infrastructure, procurement and the lack of research on research uptake.

Questions for consideration in the transfer of knowledge for the creation of innovative goods and evidence-based policies are:

a) What are the most pressing research uptake challenges for addressing global challenges?
b) What could be done to improve the uptake of new research-based knowledge for addressing the global challenges, for those institutions producing research and for those at the policy level and at the practical implementation level?
c) Are there examples of good practice for overcoming the proximate causes of sub-optimal uptake?

Below are some of the challenges, potential solutions and programmatic examples that pertain to advancing research uptake by policy-makers, as identified by participants during the panel discussion. The challenges listed here do not represent the landscape in its entirety, but serve to signpost important focus areas for research uptake and policy dialogue programmes going forward.

a) **Challenge**: In some cases, policy-makers do not engage in reviews of current research, due in part to research evidence being couched in academic language. This can inhibit researchers and policy-makers from coming to accord on common objectives and to reaching a fuller understanding of capacities and opportunities to apply research evidence in the policy-making process. **Solution:** Create a communication strategy and foster a culture of open dialogue between research project partners (including policy makers in the research development process), to ensure the research agenda aligns to key policy priorities, and to ensure that objectives and expectations are understood by all. Establishing a 'think tank'

accessible to research partners and relevant stakeholders that could contribute towards the uptake of the research being conducted would also contribute to this process.

DRUSSA Example: It is important that university policies serve not only discrete purposes, but that they help to join-up multiple institutional components in the delivery of wider institutional strategy. Communication policies, for example, can do more than articulate the means of engaging external actors with research findings, but can also relate to how the research process should be directed with external stakeholders in mind. In this way, communication policies, research management policies, public relations policies, human resources policies (which establish key performance indicators for academic and administrative staff) should interrelate in order to support a coherent and comprehensive institutional research uptake system. One strong example of how this has been done comes from Makerere University, a partner in the DRUSSA programme, which authored an extensive "Research and Innovations Communication Strategy" in 2016. Whilst previous policies were not seen to link knowledge production, communication, visibility and application sufficiently, the new policy sets out a procedural framework for knowledge translation, communication and dissemination, while setting out clear responsibilities across the university to enhance research uptake by end users.

CAAST-Net Plus Example: For research uptake to work, it is imperative that stakeholders from a range of sectors are aware of research being conducted, its purposes and the expected outcomes. Additionally, regular multistakeholder engagements allows actors to discuss and debate research activities, optimising the level of understanding across all actors. By doing so, both policymakers and researchers can communicate their interests, clarify their role in research, and make informed decisions about the interventions to take. CAAST-Net Plus for instance, organises stakeholder forums between scientists, policymakers, private and public sector representatives and other relevant stakeholders in specific themes such as health, climate change and food security. These forums aim to provide a platform for fostering discussions among stakeholders for gathering informed opinion and experience about the bi-regional cooperation process, formulating and disseminating it in such a way as to be admissible to the formal bi-regional STI policy dialogue process and to programme owners.

b) **Challenge:** There is minimal community engagement in the early stages of research development, which in turn inhibits effective community engagement with research findings at the dissemination stage. **Solution:** Discussions with community members should be prioritised and optimised early in the research process (through identifying urgent and/or persistent problems which require policy solutions), and ensure consistent follow up with community members on how the research can address a community's needs. Universities should consider further feedback and suggestions provided by the community, in part to help maintain and strengthen trust and confidence between researchers and community actors.

DRUSSA Example: For research to address resilient social and economic challenges, it is important to engage actors who inhabit the social and economic spaces experiencing such challenges early in the research process. Mindful of this, one University of Fort Hare project, the "Public Safety Smart City" project, has taken an innovative approach to "crowdsourcing" research data from local citizens in districts of East London, South Africa, to help inform research that is directed towards influencing public safety policy at the local level of government. Residents are invited to contribute incidents, experiences, photographs and testimonies relating to public safety hazards in order to better inform safety and security policy, in alignment with researchers' understanding of global good practice in urban planning and public safety policy design.

CAAST-Net Plus: Although the project's function is to inform policy processes, CAAST-Net Plus has profiled various research projects working closely with communities, and involving them in the research from the onset. By profiling these engagements both online and in project magazines which are distributed to a wide range of stakeholders, researchers can draw good practices of involving the community in research activities. For instance, the Missed Opportunities in Maternal and Infant Health (MOMI) project, worked closely with community members from the commencement to the conclusion of the research. Community health workers and mothers were trained in postpartum care and family planning and the community was equipped with sustainable tools to continue improving the lives of mothers and their infants in the community. As a result, infant and maternal health services have improved in communities in Malawi, Burkina Faso, Kenya and Mozambique. At the end of the project in January 2016, a meeting on the results and findings of the project was held with community and health facility workers. This and a number of other EU-Africa research projects sharing experiences in engaging with the community have been profiled via CAAST-Net Plus communication channels.

c) **Challenge:** Policy-makers and researchers often have different priorities and different agendas set in different institutional environments. These differences can pose a challenge in coming to an accord on a research agenda that aligns with policy-making priorities and processes difficult. **Solution:** Regular**,** focussed dialogue and channels of engagement (partially through establishment of formal symposia) should be strengthened between ministries of government and universities in order to better understand (and resolve) institutional cultural differences, ways of working, and to set mutual agenda to support evidence informed policy-making.

DRUSSA Example: The DRUSSA programme sought to support engagement between academics and representatives of government through the establishment of Policy Symposia in two of the programme's focus countries, Ghana and Uganda. Six series of symposia were facilitated by six ministries in the two focus countries which oversee different aspects of development policy in areas ranging from agriculture to energy, finance, resource development, science and technology and the environment. In Uganda, these symposia were focussed specifically on involving research evidence in the revision of existing national policies, whereas, in Ghana, symposia were directed towards addressing emerging issues of policy relevance. Aside from their particular policy focus, these series of symposia also served the purpose of strengthening academic-policy communication, helping encourage co-design and mutual agenda-setting between universities and ministries of government and identifying areas of future collaboration.

*CAAST-Net Plus Example: To foster the alignment of priorities and agendas of stakeholders involved in the research uptake process, CAAST-Net Plus has organised a number of actors to openly discuss research and policy matters through stakeholder forums and focused workshops. Representatives of the Regional Economic Communities, research community, government officials, and private sector have, during these gatherings discussed their priorities and potential avenues to collaborate on common research priorities. In addition, the project has documented recommendations for each key stakeholder in contributing effectively towards the research uptake process. For instance, the **Findings and Recommendations for Decision-makers: Transferring Knowledge into Solutions – Africa-EU Strategies for Science, Technology and Innovation** entails strategies that consider the policy-making process, and the researcher and policy-makers' priorities. One recommendation from this report was to foster the establishment of knowledge sharing and match-making structures to support stakeholder involvement in research and innovation projects. By actively participating in multistakeholder forums and discussing their respective*

priorities, both researchers and policy-makers get an opportunity to not only align their priorities with that of other stakeholders, but also to be part of the solution and anticipate research and policy issues.

d) **Challenge:** Research timelines do not necessarily naturally align with those of policy-makers. Political timelines and priorities can often shift during the course of a substantive research project, making it difficult to predict and plan for the application of research findings in a particular policy development process. **Solution:** Universities can address this by involving non-governmental organisations, civil society organisations, community actors and enterprise to build wider consensus around the developmental relevance of the research itself, helping to ensure the longer-term recognition of the relevance of the research amongst policy-makers.

DRUSSA Example: Aside from the Policy Symposia described above, DRUSSA also facilitated a series of Higher Education Symposia in four of the programme's focus countries (Ghana, Uganda, Mauritius and Botswana), which were led by relevant ministries of higher and further education, and which convened both DRUSSA and non-DRUSSA universities in-country. The purpose of these symposia did not directly concern evidence-informed policy-making, but rather ways in which HE and FE ministries can both modify and strengthen support for the higher education sector to drive development research and to manage research effectively. These symposia helped to sensitise civil servants in the higher and further education policy arena as to the research management capacity building needs universities experience, and to seek solutions to better position universities as sources of evidence for development research more broadly.

CAAST-Net Plus Example: Much effort by the CAAST-Net Plus consortium addresses not research itself but the political, social and institutional conditions under which research is undertaken. Through convening events in various countries to discuss and raise awareness of these conditions the consortium seeks to lower barriers and improve the efficiency of bi-regional cooperation. An example concerns the Research Fairness Initiative (RFI) consultations in Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana and Belgium, which were hosted by CAAST-Net Plus partner COHRED, in partnership with ministries of education and research. RFI is a system that promotes fairer collaboration in research and innovation by encouraging institutions to self-report on their policies and practices. The results from these consultations are packaged and accessible freely online, for the information of other stakeholders in other regions.

e) **Challenge:** Emergent issues of immediate and sudden topicality to media agents and the public at large may redirect politicians' focus, leading to spurred decision-making, sometimes without adequate time to consult and apply research evidence. This can lead to inappropriate solutions to agreed challenges. **Solution:** Researchers should sustain regular liaison with policy-makers and provide constant reminders of research objectives and how these can respond to policy priorities. Current research activities should not be compromised by media cycles or sudden changes in policy. Furthermore, strategies should be put in place to ensure research activities are completed and taken up appropriately, without being hastened unnecessarily.

DRUSSA Example: This challenge relates to a dissonance between policy-making and research cycles, which can be exacerbated by sudden events that shift political priorities. Alongside close engagement between academics and policy-makers, solutions to this problem can also involve academic-media engagement, to help support public dialogue with high-quality, contextualised and synthesised evidence. DRUSSA has supported the upskilling of university research uptake staff and active research staff in areas of science communication, research utilisation and media engagement in order to help them to better

translate research knowledge and to better involve academic voices in public discussions of policy relevance.

*CAAST-Net Plus Example: One communication channel that CAAST-Net Plus has utilised in reporting research news with the EU-Africa landscape is Twitter. By drawing the attention of research ministries to certain news around research outcomes, it serves as a reminder on the current research cycles. Although this kind of communication might not reach those that are responsible for implementing policies, communicating on research outcomes may serve as a reminder on what the current research priorities are. Additionally, CAAST-Net Plus has profiled some of its key activities on EU-Africa research and innovation developments via research news websites such as *Research (by CAAST-Net Plus partner ResearchResearch). Regular announcements on research developments are also circulated to key stakeholders in the policymaking sector.*

f) **Challenge:** Measuring research impact and uptake can be a complex task in some research processes. **Solution:** Establish universal monitoring and evaluation (M&E) indicators that can be applied by researchers and policy-makers. Policy implementers can take the lead in long-term impact evaluation processes, and applying existing metrics for effective uptake processes led by universities. Ministries implementing policies will benefit from understanding each other's M&E focus areas, and what is being measured.

DRUSSA Example: Measuring and attributing research impact is indeed a complex, and long-term, enterprise, and universities and policymakers each have particular capacities to understand the nature of change brought about by evidence-informed policy. For universities, DRUSSA has played an advisory role in the design of institutional research uptake plans and monitoring and evaluation frameworks to better understand not only the impact of research findings amongst social agents, but also how internal institutional policy and strategy reforms have helped to build and improve research uptake pathways. This is important for universities looking to model efficient and effective research uptake systems.

For example, the University of Rwanda has taken an innovative approach to incentivising research uptake through integrating human resources and research policies to recognise and reward verifiable and high-quality research uptake activity as a mark of eligibility in application of internal research funding. The University is measuring the influence this has had in motivating research uptake activity amongst staff and in how they pursue and sustain channels of communication with external bodies – an important step in knowing where to look for longer-term research evidence and which support systems have helped to bring it about.

CAAST-Net Plus Example: CAAST-Net Plus has conducted online surveys in an attempt to monitor and evaluate specific research outcomes. Previous M&E interventions include the impact study on EU-Africa food security research collaboration targeted at European and African individuals involved in bilateral programmes funded by the European Commission, member states or national governments; evaluations of the Horizon 2020 information sessions and national contact points training workshops; and a workshop to review results from a three-country study on framework conditions in Africa-EU food security research and innovation. Although M&E can be a complicated process, implementing ministries can borrow from M&E interventions conducted by CAAST-Net Plus, DRUSSA, and projects alike, making it a less complex process.

g) **Challenge:** Science-informed advice is sometimes overlooked by policy implementers due to stringent political timelines. Additionally, implementation roles are not always clear to partners, and areas of responsibility between researchers and policy-makers can be unclear. This can challenge the establishment of long-term trust and mutual confidence between

researchers and policymakers when delivery is compromised through misunderstanding. **Solution:** Regional bodies are encouraged to share good practices in evidence-informed policymaking between countries within a region, such as the SADC, international consensus on the value of research evidence, and good models of translating and applying research. This support from regional bodies can result in the implementation of effective policies that are guided by research results.

DRUSSA Example*: It is critical that the sharing of good practice in research uptake occurs not only at the national level, but at the regional and international level as well. This is important in order to allow academics and policy-makers to consider the comparative dynamics of different national HE and policy environments, and how they enable evidence-informed policy-making in different (and perhaps adaptable) ways.*

DRUSSA has supported regional engagement not only through its international university benchmarking conferences, but also through Africa's various Research and Innovation Management Associations, including in Southern Africa (SARIMA), East Africa (EARIMA), West Africa (WARIMA) and Central Africa (CARIMA). These regional forums are natural spaces for research management leaders and active research staff to share experiences, good practice and innovative solutions to bringing their research into use, and how different models of policy engagement can lead to different outcomes. The DRUSSA/CAAST-Net Plus sessions at the joint ACU-SARIMA Conference in May 2015 is an excellent example of how these forums serve as vital regional intersections of experience and good practice.

CAAST-Net Plus Example: *CAAST-Net Plus has organised workshops with African and European science academies and their networks to share good practices on playing a scientific advisory role for policy implementers. These workshops convene not only representatives of science academies but also involve members of the Regional Economic Communities, the European Commission and the African Union Commission. From these discussions, all stakeholders involved have an opportunity to draw lessons learnt on using science for policy, and find clarity on their roles in their respective sectors.*

Modalities for the Effective Uptake of Research in EU-Africa Research Collaboration

The successful uptake of research is the responsibility of all stakeholders in a research partnership. Engagement between stakeholders should be mutually owned and led in order to ensure that the problems to be addressed are agreed upon, capacity for joint enterprise in solving these problems are established and expected outcomes, timelines and processes are understood. *Figure 1* below outlines the proposed modalities for research uptake, as identified at the forum.
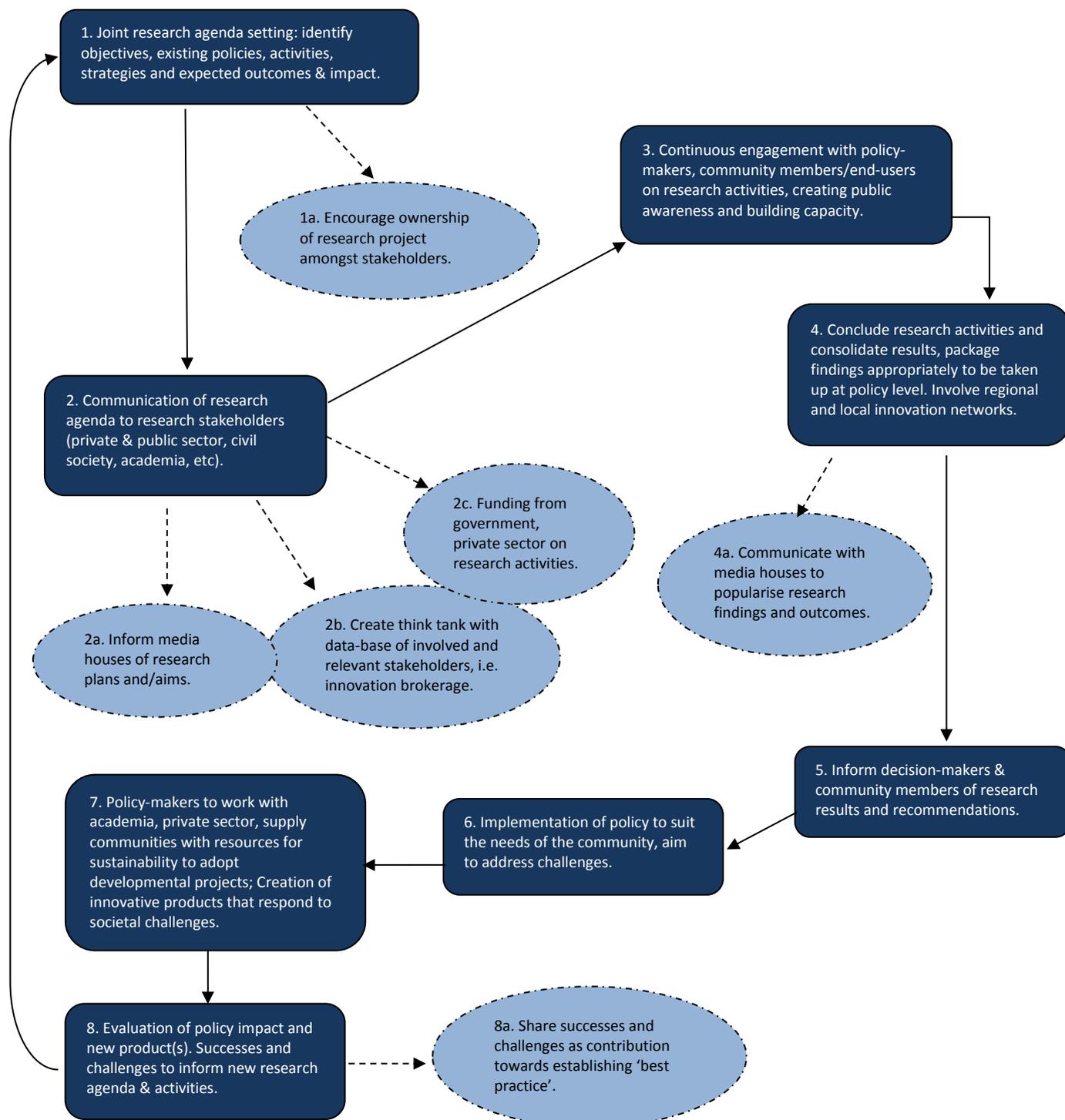

Figure 1: The implementation of evidence-based policies is a responsibility of all stakeholders involved, the process is also dependent on complementary priorities and activities between partners, and an effective communication strategy.

Emerging lessons from EU-Africa Initiatives – CAAST-Net Plus and DRUSSA

CAAST-Net Plus and the DRUSSA programme each focus on both the supply and demand sides of research to better enable its use in improving services and addressing societal challenges. Each of these initiatives can lend learning and experience to how such university/policy-making partnerships can be successfully established – for the purposes of this paper, in consideration of the Africa-EU research and innovation partnership scope.

To date, CAAST-Net Plus has held several stakeholder forums and consultation meetings that bring together representatives from a range of sectors to discuss potential mechanisms for partnerships that address challenge societal challenges.

One key example of such an engagement is detailed in a project report emanating from the CAAST-Net Plus first stakeholder forum, titled *Transferring Knowledge into Solutions: Africa-EU Strategies for Science, Technology and Innovation*. The report offers strategies for applying STI to tackle global challenges of food and nutrition security, health, and climate change. The report suggests actions for implementation for decision-makers in three contexts: at inter-regional, sub-regional and national context. The recommendations are clustered around areas such as establishing knowledge sharing to support stakeholder involvement in research and innovation projects, supporting joint Africa-EU Centres of Excellence and Think Tanks, and fostering closer collaboration between academia and industry through the African Regional Economic Communities. The first project's EU-Africa STI Stakeholder Forum, took place in Uganda, November 2014. The project will continue to host similar engagements with key representatives in policy, research, private and public sectors, and documenting lessons learnt through its activities, to inform other related research consortiums.

Similarly, one core focus of the DRUSSA programme has been to establish and normalise engagement between policy-making and research-producing communities in effort of informing research design with development policy priorities, and, in turn, informing development policy with robust research evidence. One way in which DRUSSA has done this is through piloting the secondment of academic fellows into ministries of government (with developmental agenda) in two programme focus countries (Ghana and Uganda). Academic fellows from four universities were placed in six ministries between the two countries for periods of up to one year, where they were able to: confer research evidence with senior policy-making colleagues; advise on knowledge translation processes and explain complex scientific findings for practical application; and learn more about governmental/institutional cultures, ways of working, agenda-setting processes and current topics of political interest, which they could then relay to academic and research management colleagues at their home institutions to inform future research design.

Further to this, DRUSSA established University Policy Symposia, bringing together fellow-hosting ministries with research universities to jointly establish approaches to EIPM and opportunities for joint responsibility in evaluating and bringing quality research into use. Alongside such symposia, civil servants at participating ministries were also trained in assessing and evaluating research evidence for application.

Though these demand-side activities were core to the DRUSSA programme, the overall focus of DRUSSA has been on supporting the research supply-side to develop effective research uptake systems, to up-skill university staff in research uptake methodologies and to build and sustain effective partnerships with critical stakeholders, including policy-makers. In doing this, DRUSSA held campus workshops at each of the 22 participating universities which brought together active researchers, research managers, public relations managers and other offices with key responsibilities for partnership building. One objective of these workshops was to share good practice in stakeholder engagement, embedding principles of uptake early in research processes, setting out

joined-up institutional processes to support partnership building (including with policy-makers), and translating research for external use and application.

Conclusions

In conclusion, research uptake should be characterised by appropriately packaged research outputs, inclusive participation of a variety of stakeholders, adopting best practices from other research partnerships, and research that complements policy and vice versa. Each stakeholder brings a unique and significant contribution in the process of research uptake, including the design of policies and new products influenced by evidence.

A well-defined communication and dissemination strategy is necessary for research activities, and policy priorities need to be known and accessible to all stakeholders. The creation of an enabling environment should include developing awareness, networks and building capacity and training in generating knowledge for policy purposes, i.e. research being undertaken at universities. In addition, a relationship with media houses is essential in communicating research results and popularising impacts.

An inclusive, participatory and multidisciplinary approach is encouraged within research partnerships. This entails consultative processes, emphasising on public-private partnerships, engaging with members of civil society, academia, community members and end-users, innovators, business representatives, government officials, etc., which can yield transparency of contributions and efforts towards the creation and prioritising evidence-driven policies.

Differences in policy-making and research development timelines, as well as broader differences in institutional cultures and ways of working between public, private and academic circles, can seem, at times, intractable. Thus, all partners need to remain well-prepared to contribute towards the research uptake process. Collective actions and consideration of the different capacities and contributions that each stakeholder possesses can result in innovative, demand-driven products, and policies that are designed to effectively resolve societal challenges. Furthermore, although no 'one-size-fits-all' approach in research uptake exists, key lessons and 'best practices' can be learnt from projects such as CAAST-Net Plus, DRUSSA, and initiatives alike.

Endnotes

[i]For more information on the Seventh Framework Programme, see *Understanding the Seventh Framework Programme* https://ec.europa.eu/research/fp7/index_en.cfm?pg=understanding

[ii]*Development Research Uptake in Sub-Saharan Africa (DRUSSA)* https://www.acu.ac.uk/focus-areas/research-management-uptake/drussa

[iii]*ACU SARIMA Conference 2015 information* https://www.acu.ac.uk/events/ACU-SARIMA-2015/

[iv]Event announcement on *Workshop on Pathways for Research Uptake* https://caast-net-plus.org/object/news/1156