

# Involving Science Academies & Africa's Regional Economic Communities in EU-Africa Policy Dialogues

8-9 November 2016  
Johannesburg, South Africa

**Workshop Report and Recommendations**



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**Building Bi-regional Partnerships for Global Challenges**



CAAST-Net Plus is funded by the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development (FP7/2007-2013) under grant agreement n° 311806. This document reflects only the author's views and the European Union cannot be held liable for any use that may be made of the information contained herein.

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D4.2 | Version 1.0 | PUBLIC | December 2017

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

One of the key objectives of CAAST-Net Plus is to promote technical exchanges among multidisciplinary stakeholders in order to formulate and disseminate informed opinion and experience about research and innovation cooperation between Africa and Europe. The aim in this regard, is to promote mutual learning, raise awareness, broker novel partnerships that will encourage improved uptake and translation of joint research, thus enriching the Africa-EU Research and Innovation (R&I) Partnership. During the course of 2016, CAAST-Net Plus continued to implement this mandate by hosting a series of dialogues aimed at facilitating the participation of African Regional Economic Communities (RECs) as well as European and African science academies within various initiatives and programmes of the Africa-EU R&I Partnership. The sequel to these dialogues took the form of a workshop with science academies and RECs organised by the Department of Science and Technology (DST) of South Africa on 8 – 9 November 2016 in Johannesburg. This report provides a summary of the discussions which took place and highlights recommendations offered by the array of participants who took part in the workshop.

### 1.1. Purpose of the Workshop

Drawing on recommendations emerging from previous dialogues organised by CAAST-Net Plus<sup>1</sup> with both Africa's RECs and science academies, the aim of this particular workshop was to discuss and delineate mechanisms required for providing evidence-informed policy advice towards bi-regional policy dialogue processes. Secondly, this workshop was also aimed at identifying the role that science academies can play in implementing the Africa-EU R&I Partnership on Food and Nutrition Security and Sustainable Agriculture.

### 1.2. Structure of Workshop Proceedings

Given the varied yet specialised context within which national academies are embedded, the first day of the workshop focused on establishing an understanding of the Africa-EU R&I Partnership through the lens of both the European Commission (EC) and African Union Commission (AUC). A thought-provoking keynote address titled, *The Science-Policy-Society Interface* led the way for a lively facilitated discussion on the second day of the workshop as science academies exchanged ideas and offered solutions on the various ways in which they could provide evidence-informed advice to policy makers within national, regional and bi-regional governance structures. The two-day workshop concluded with a presentation on the Knowledge Management and Communication System, earmarked as one of the key mechanisms for implementing the FNSSA Roadmap.

### 1.3. Who Participated?

More than 30 national science academies from Africa and Europe participated in the workshop. In addition to national academies, the Network for African Science Academies (NASAC), European Academies' Science Advisory Council (EASAC) and All European Academies (ALLEA) represented continental academy networks at the workshop. Policy makers, representatives from RECs, local research funding institutions and researchers with expertise in the fields of food security and agriculture also took part. A list of participants is contained in Annex A.

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<sup>1</sup> See all news/reports related to CAAST-Net Plus workshops with Africa's Regional Economic Communities and Science Academies <https://caast-net-plus.org/search?tagsearch=0&q=recs>

## **2. AFRICA-EU R&I PARTNERSHIP AND THE SCIENCE-POLICY DIALOGUE**

Mr Daan du Toit, Deputy Director General: International Cooperation and Resources at the DST, delivered opening remarks indicating that science academies could use their combined expertise to intensify the collaborative links between Africa and Europe, by drawing on their niche in producing scientifically sound evidence to solve the complex development challenges commonly faced by countries around the globe. He stressed that an enabling environment that draws on the scientific vigilance of academies to develop and formulate continental and bi-regional strategies and policies needs to be created to respond meaningfully to the socio-economic challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **2.1. Africa-EU Research and Innovation Cooperation: Two continents one partnership**

Representatives from the African Union Commission (AUC) and European Commission (EC), delivered an overview of the primary elements that constitute the Africa-EU R&I Partnership. An outline of the Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES) adopted by European and African heads of state in 2007 was provided. This was followed by a summary of the R&I Roadmap on FNSSA together with four research priorities, namely sustainable intensification, agriculture and food systems for nutrition, expansion and improvement of agricultural markets and trade and cross cutting issues with a focus on innovation. The Roadmap will be informed by short-to-medium term, mechanisms of implementation through joint research calls such as Horizon 2020 (H2020), African Union Research Grants, the LEAP-Agri Call and other Africa-EU projects.

It was noted that the continued strategic interest to position science, technology and innovation (STI) at the helm of the Africa-EU R&I Partnership, had seen the gross domestic expenditure on research and development in a number of European member states moving from 2% to 3% Gross Expenditure on Research and Development (GERD) as a percentage of GDP. Many African countries however, have not met the 1% GERD target agreed to. Instead, 70% of STI funding in many African states is derived from development aid. This reality acts as a constraint as many of these countries are unable to pursue priorities essential for achieving their national development agendas. It was suggested that African policy makers should to combat this trend by increasing domestic investment in national STI initiatives.

Discussions amongst workshop participants were met with the recommendations summarised below:

#### **Recommendations from the AUC, EC and participants**

- ✓ **Science academies could play a role in evaluating the outcomes of the Africa-EU R&I Partnership with the view of assessing the impact of this partnership. The results of these evaluations could be used to inform policy-making and decisions taken by senior officials;**
- ✓ **The AUC should draw on the capacities of science academies to conduct studies in areas of strategic interest to the continent as opposed to utilizing external consultants who may not be fully cognisant of the African context;**
- ✓ **Bi-regional R&I cooperation between Africa and Europe should be characterised by greater efforts to align the priorities and research agendas of funders, donor agencies and multilateral governance institutions with the priorities of African and European governments; and**
- ✓ **Policy-makers and science academies in Africa need to jointly identify actions requisite to attract private sector funding to increase gross expenditure on research and development.**

## 2.2. Evidence-Informed Advice for Bi-regional Policy Dialogues: Perspectives for policy makers and science academies

Professor John Mugabe of the Graduate School of Technology Management at the University of Pretoria, South Africa, delivered a keynote address on *“The Science-Policy-Society Interface in Continental and Global Policy Dialogues and Institutions”*. He highlighted that the science-policy-society interface was rarely reflected upon by scientists and policy makers due to the complex and multi-dimensional nature of this interface. He explained that while policy-in-science pertained to the formulation and use of policies to promote, regulate and govern science, science-in-policy pertains to the procurement or provision of science in policy-making processes. Moreover, science-in-society is premised on a utilitarian view, in which science is perceived as containing pre-determined goods for society. In this instance, scientists need to be sensitive and responsive to the evolving needs and challenges of society.

It was noted that governments need to have well defined strategic imperatives that guide their participation in policy dialogues or risk participating in dialogues that are absent of the type of scientific solutions required to solve their societal challenges. Both science academies and policy-makers need to be aware that some global and regional policy dialogues leverage participation of experts, institutions and countries, in order to deliberate on issues of mutual but not necessarily common interest. As such, policy-makers and science academies need to be aware that policy dialogues may tend to act as mechanisms of conflict resolution, reducing both policy and socio-political tensions.

It was also revealed that the carriers or brokers of science in policy dialogues tend to be politicians, journalists, opinion leaders, ambassadors of global development challenges, non-governmental organisations and church groups. Such a dynamic requires science academies to be aware of both the complexities of the science-policy-society interface as well as the myriad of actors that operate within this interface.

### Recommendations for science academies and policy-makers: Perspectives from participants

- ✓ Science academies need to be granted the necessary scope to participate in policy-making processes. Policy-makers need to develop systemic procedures and legislation to further facilitate and strengthen the use of science-in-policy for society. This could entail supporting the establishment of national science academies as well as the official use of academies as sources of expertise and scientific evidence;
- ✓ Policy-makers need to establish national science policy dialogues to feed bi-regional, continental and global policy dialogue platforms; and
- ✓ Science academies need to be aware that communication and dissemination of science-policy advice is to be supplemented and supported through the capacities of actors such as policy-brokers who have come to occupy a prominent position as key influencers in national and global policy-making processes. Furthermore, science academies need to conduct enquiries into policy processes and the politics that drive these processes.

### 3. SCIENCE ACADEMIES AND BI-REGIONAL POLICY DIALOGUE PROCESSES

#### 3.1. The role of science academies in influencing continental and global policy frameworks

During the second day of the workshop, representatives from NASAC and EASAC delivered presentations on good practices, challenges and opportunities for bi-regional cooperation.

Ms Jackie Olang provided an overview of the objectives and mandate that guides the operation of NASAC, which consists of 24 national academies. It was noted that the unique role of national science academies in Africa and their continental networks in policy advice and policy-making processes, is their autonomy in gathering and offering evidence to influence the policy positions of governments. Echoing concerns raised on the first day of the workshop, it was cautioned that policy advice is not a precursor to policy-making. As such, science academies in Africa need to ensure that evidence gathered for the purposes of policy advice and policy-making is scientifically robust, relevant to local and global contexts and aligned to clear impact measures.

Dr Tracey Elliot provided an overview of EASAC which, amongst its core objectives, aims to encourage inter-regional cooperation between its 27 member academies on global challenges. The primary focus of EASAC is the notion of science-for-policy. This has translated into the production of scientific publications which are increasingly becoming easily accessible and intelligible to a wide audience. Research communities which operate outside the realm of science academies have been mobilized and incentivised to publish peer-reviewed articles in acclaimed scientific journals. This, coupled with the growing policy demand for interdisciplinary advice within the EC has seen the development of the Science Advice Mechanism – a bottom-up approach which has enabled EASAC and some of its member academies to provide independent and cross-disciplinary advice to the EC. It was noted that the Science Advice Mechanism has also become a platform to build capacity within academies and their networks.

A facilitated discussion enabled participants to openly engage concerning the barriers that science academies encounter in positioning themselves as strategic players within national and continental policy dialogue processes. Recommendations stemming from these deliberations are provided below:

**Recommendations and good practices: Science academies and RECs**

- ✓ Lobbying for legitimate scientific concerns and fundraising are difficult tasks for both European and African academies to undertake, particularly given the importance of maintaining their independence and autonomy in providing science-informed advice. This tension needs to be addressed by building the professional and human capacity of academy personnel serving their secretariat;
- ✓ The disjuncture or misalignment of national, regional and continental priorities was identified as one of the major challenges in some of the collaborative initiatives between African science academies and their European counterparts. In some instances, availability of resources and funding determined the priorities of some academies, particularly on the African side. It was noted that this disjuncture and misalignment could be addressed through the recognition and quantifying of in-kind contributions (e.g. scientific expertise, infrastructure, transfer of knowledge and data) of science academies that did not have enough financial resources;
- ✓ In as much as a lack of capacity has been cited as one of the major hindrances behind Africa's development agenda, the ample amount of research and knowledge production taking place, is increasingly refuting this perception. The challenge may not be a lack of capacity, but rather a need for a more systematic approach in coordinating research results as well as the complex web of partnerships and collaborative networks that cut across and intersect between various stakeholders including science academies;
- ✓ In the European context, the disconnect between the research and policy environments is in part, being addressed through the inclusion of science academies in conceptualising and co-designing joint research funding instruments such as H2020 calls with policy makers. It was suggested that a similar approach could be adopted in bridging the science-policy gap in Africa, by creating an enabling environment for science academies to play a greater role in co-designing regional and continental STI strategies;
- ✓ Framework conditions for the provision of science-informed advice are not always clear, particularly given the varied and complex exchanges between scientists and policy-makers. The onus is therefore on both African and European science academies to identify good practices which can inform and facilitate these framework conditions; and
- ✓ Regional Economic Communities stressed that continental and regional STI policies and strategies require actors which will champion implementation. Science academies should fill this gap by conceptualising and carrying out implementation processes where appropriate.

The final session of the workshop presented a shift in focus, as participants turned their attention to the Africa-EU Knowledge Management and Communication System (KMCS), one of the long-term approaches earmarked for implementing the FNSSA Roadmap. The summary below provides an account of the key points which emerged from the presentations delivered, while emphasising recommendations offered by the participants.

The KMCS is one of the key outputs which emerged during the Africa-EU High Level Policy Dialogue Stakeholder Forum hosted by CAAST-Net Plus in April 2016. It is premised on the numerous institutions in both continents which possess existing platforms for knowledge management, digital and non-digital communication and partnership platforms. It was noted that the challenge with many existing platforms lies with ensuring that available knowledge is used to inform policy, improve food systems and processes, promote market access and bi-regional trade, while supporting innovation for social and economic gain. The KMCS will partly address these challenges by promoting

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research uptake while linking research and data with the private sector and policy-makers in several fields through contemporary communication channels.

The focal point of the discussions with science academies and the RECs regarding the KMCS was a power point slide (figure 1) presented by a representative from the Platform for African European Partnership on Agricultural Research for Development. The slide (figure 1) depicted a landscape of more than 35 projects, research institutions, public-public and public-private partnerships, multilateral governance institutions and online platforms. It was noted that these various institutions, partnerships and platforms either provide or receive funding to conduct research or establish research collaboration networks and agricultural extension programmes within the FNSSA domain.



Figure 1: A landscape of projects, research institutions, public-public and public-private partnerships, multilateral governance institutions and online platforms within the FNSSA thematic area.

What was evident from the presentation of this slide, is that the landscape of existing platforms is vast, interconnected and characterized by a number of complexities which are socio-economic as well as political in nature.

Recommendations which emerged from the discussions on the KMCS are as follows:

**Recommendations and good practices: Science academies and RECs**

- ✓ **There is a need to ascertain the various types of platforms which exist within the FNSSA domain and to document the findings by providing an outline of the landscape of platforms. This could be a preliminary move in detecting duplications across the landscape and to possibly establish what the emerging impact or effectiveness of these platforms is;**
- ✓ **It was noted that most of the African platforms receive development aid or donor funding. As such, creating strong links with agri-business and private sector organisations is essential not only for the platforms depicted in figure 1 but also for the KMCS;**
- ✓ **Given the silos across the platforms depicted in figure 1, the proposed KMCS will need to play a strong coordinating role in not only linking research outputs and data across the two continents, but in mapping funding opportunities and also networking opportunities through the myriad of forums, dialogues and workshops that take place across the landscape of platforms; and**

Following the workshop, a questionnaire (attached in Annex B) was developed by CAAST-Net Plus and piloted amongst science academies to gain and analyse their views regarding the development of a blue print for the KMCS. The elements which emerged across the responses provided indicate that:

- science academies, particularly African academies, are not aware of the Africa-EU Research and Innovation Partnership let alone the various accompanying initiatives, programmes and activities within which they could participate. The KMCS would have to act as a vehicle for raising awareness, elevating the profile of the Africa-EU Partnership and effectively disseminating information;
- key challenges which science academies have experienced in sharing knowledge, include funding and garnering interest amongst policy makers for the uptake of recommendations highlighted in their policy briefs. Identified in assessments of other knowledge sharing platforms, the solutions to these challenges will need to be addressed in the KMCS blue print; and
- face-to-face exchanges and digital modes of communication aimed at sharing information, data, opportunities and technical expertise are essential in the formulation of a KMCS. At the same time, with the sharing of data and findings of research, boundaries and consensus from participating stakeholders with regards to intellectual property need to be clearly identified

Science academies and RECs were further informed that additional consultations would be undertaken with various stakeholders in Europe and Africa. These consultations will be a crucial step in the development of the KMCS blue print.

## 4. CONCLUSION

In summary, policy-makers need to create an enabling environment to facilitate dialogues with Africa's RECs and science academies from both regions to strengthen the use of science-in-policy for society. Supporting the establishment of national science academies and utilising academies as sources of expertise and scientific evidence is one way to create such an environment.

In terms of attracting business representatives to participate in bi-regional policy dialogues, science academies and policy-makers need to jointly identify areas of priorities, this way, the actions to address societal challenges are a collaborative effort, which could consequently lead to greater impact.

Communication and dissemination of information needs to reach all stakeholders – from policy-makers to science academies to researchers and to private sector representatives, so that each stakeholder is well-informed and decisions are made based on the information provided. The KMCS would be best suited to fulfil this vision.

In essence, there are various approaches in involving science academies and Africa's RECs in EU-Africa policy dialogues, while science academies can support policy-makers in championing STI policies and serving as science advisories, policy-makers must strengthen their ties with science academies and the private sector in order to collectively and effectively address societal challenges.