



ENGAGING SMEs IN EU-AFRICA SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION (STI) RESEARCH COOPERATION

Context of the Workshop

At the occasion of the 5th EU-Africa Business Forum and the 4th EU-Africa Summit, the Finnish University Partnership for International Development (UniPID) convened a stakeholders' workshop in cooperation with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, ESASTAP Plus¹, PAEPARD², and CAAST-Net Plus in Brussels, Belgium March 31st, 2014. The workshop sought to discuss and map out practical ways in which Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) can and should be engaged in EU-Africa STI research collaboration. Three key questions framed the content of the workshop:

- How are current EU-Africa research and business policies supporting or limiting collaboration between researchers and business?
- What kinds of challenges are SMEs in EU and Africa facing in engaging in joint research partnerships? What are best practice examples?
- What is the way forward for researchers, policy makers, and SMEs in enhancing STI research partnerships within the Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES) roadmaps?

More than 40 participants from around Europe and Africa took part in the workshop, comprising researchers, representatives from industry, and policy makers. The workshop was chaired by Professor Hannu J. Korhonen from MTT Agrifood Research Finland and co-chaired by Daan Du Toit Minister Counsellor (Science and Technology), South Africa Mission to the European Union.

This report highlights the main points of discussion during the workshop and presents the main conclusions from the event.

¹ Strengthening Technology, Research and Innovation Cooperation between Europe and South Africa

² Promoting African-European Research Infrastructures Partnerships

Summary

Ambassador Mrs. Pilvi-Sisko Vierros-Villeneuve, Permanent Representative of Finland to the EU, opened the workshop by highlighting three meaningful factors for research-SME cooperation:

- competitiveness and development,
- strategic thinking for policy making, and
- mutually beneficial partnerships.

The keynote presenters, Ambassador Wendell McIntosh and Judith Francis, presented the background and context for bi-regional SME-STI cooperation. Both speakers emphasized that opportunities do exist for mutually beneficial bi-regional SME-STI cooperation, provided the right enabling conditions are in place. These conditions include **supportive policies, financing, institutions, and infrastructure**.

Case examples were presented by Barend Taute of the Technology and Human Resources for Industry Programme (THRIP), Mikko Punakivi of the Makery Science Park and Hubconcpets Cooperation Model, and Sabine Möbs of the Baden-Württemberg Cooperative State University. Finally, Daan du Toit lead a panel discussion focusing on how to more effectively use existing instruments to promote and engage SMEs in bi-regional research partnerships. The Panelists included: Ambassador Wendell McIntosh, Barend Taute, Dr. John Isaac Graham Meewella, Olivier Besnard, Antoine Malhe, Dr. Francis Matambalya, and Mikko Perälä.

Key Messages

The key messages from the presentations, panel, and discussions focused on the one hand on the opportunities for cooperation, and on the other hand, on the needs for more fruitful cooperation.

- a) Opportunities for bi-regional collaboration between African and European SMEs and research consortia exist. Cooperation between these sectors is of increasing importance at international, regional, and national levels and more opportunities for building these partnerships are being created.
- b) Horizon 2020 as an instrument for cooperation has limitations and should not be seen as a panacea, but rather as one avenue for possible cooperation.
- c) More fruitful cooperation requires greater trust between the sectors – research and SMEs – and between partners. This trust can be built by integrating SMEs at an earlier stage in research development to better ensure that research meets the needs of SMEs. Increasing the participation of all key actors, including women, young professionals and students, in partnerships further strengthens this trust.

Conclusions

Arising from the presentations and discussions at the workshop are three main conclusions:

- There is a rich potential for cooperation between SMEs and research, particularly in STI partnerships.
- There is a distinct need for mechanisms to support innovation and cooperation. In Horizon 2020 specifically, targeted topics for Africa-EU collaboration (which allow the inclusion of SMEs) and support for greater numbers of NCPs are needed for developing these bi-regional, multi-sector partnerships.
- Collaboration in the innovation and entrepreneurial space should not be heavy-handed and top-down, but more open and people-centered. Opportunities should be created to allow people to get together to create and red tape should be minimized.

Minutes prepared by Melissa Plath, UniPID